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AUTHOR	de Berry, Jo; Fazili, Anahita; Farhad, Said; Nasiry, Fariba; Hashemi, Sami; Hakimi, Mariam
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ABSTRACT

Noting that helping war-affected children cope with the impact of conflict is a vital part of the post-war recovery of an entire society, this report details a qualitative study that used a series of focus group discussions with 7- to 18-year-olds and their families and participatory activities with children in Kabul, Afghanistan to gather information to guide the development of support programs for war-affected children. Three main topics were explored: (1) well-being goals for Afghan children; (2) threats children face in achieving well-being; and (3) children's coping resources. Findings revealed that Afghan families consider emotional and social development to be important, but also physical survival, and they believe that children require positive and supportive contexts and relationships to achieve well-being. Damaging threats for Kabul's children were identified as economic, environmental, political, personal, and relational, with negative consequences on children's social development, their morality, their behavior, and their opportunities. Families raise their children to cope with difficulties, and children's personal attitudes and social relations affect their ability to cope. Some short-term coping mechanisms such as hiding the truth, overprotection, use of physical punishment, and taking revenge were identified by children as having negative repercussions in the long term. The report asserts that the research findings confirm the suitability of a psychosocial framework over a trauma-oriented approach for planning sustainable support to most Afghan children. Detailed suggestions are offered for providing such support, and policy guidelines are recommended. The report also describes two follow-up pilot projects helping children to identify and take action on a concern. The report's appendices differentiate the trauma approach and the psychosocial approach to supporting war-affected children, and outline the negative feelings, causes, and coping mechanisms identified by research participants. (KB)

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The Children of Kabul

Discussions with Afghan Families

This two girls are happy because the are keeping the swing

I'm Fadi I am happy because I swing

Jo de Berry
Anahita Fazili
Said Farhad
Fariba Nasiry
Sami Hashemi
Mariam Hakimi

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The Children of Kabul

Discussions with **Afghan Families**

- Jo de Berry
- Anahita Fazili
- Said Farhad
- Fariba Nasiry
- Sami Hashemi
- Mariam Hakimi

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Contents

Acknowledgements		
Executive Summary		i-v
Chapter One	**An Introduction to the Study**	1
	Understanding Children's Lives	1
	Research Design	2
	Research Methods	3
	Project Implementation	6
Chapter Two	**Children's Well Being and Development: Values and Priorities**	7
	What is considered good and important for children's well being	8
	Influences on children's well being	12
	Achieving well being and development through positive relationships	14
	The people who are important for children's well being	14
	Methods of socialization	17
	Conclusion	20
Chapter Three	**Challenges and Difficulties for the Children of Kabul**	21
	The impact of historical and political events	23
	Threats from the physical environment	29
	Relations in the family and home	32
	Peer relations	40
	Personal characteristics	42
	Conclusion	44
Chapter Four	**Coping With the Challenges**	47
	Attitude towards suffering	48
	Social relationships as a source of help	50
	Means of comfort	52
	The impact of the wider context	54
	Personal characteristics	54
	Negative coping	57
	Conclusion	58
Chapter Five	**Recommendations for Support Programs for Children in Kabul and Afghanistan**	60
	Guide to interventions	60
	Policy recommendations	65
Epilogue	**A Follow-up Project with Children in Kabul**	72
Annex One	**Support for War-Affected Children: Guiding Frameworks**	73
Annex Two	**Full List of Negative Feelings Described by Research Participants**	75

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Save the Children Federation, Inc. (SC/US) implemented the research. The SC/US research team consisted of Sami Hashemi, Anahita Fazili, Fariba Nasiry, Said Farhad and Mariam Hakimi. Jo de Berry was the technical advisor for the project, and main compiler of this report. Additional support came from the Administration and Finance department of the SC/US Kabul office.

Executive Summary

War is a terrible experience for children. During war children are killed and injured, they lose family members and they forfeit opportunities for education and development. Children are frightened by the dangers they are living through, and scared for their own and their families' survival. Long after it ends, war leaves a legacy of destruction and loss, which affects children and their wider society. Working with war-affected children to help them cope with the impact of conflict is a vital part of the post-war recovery of a whole society.

In 2002 Save the Children Federation, Inc. (SC/US), with support from UNICEF, conducted a major consultation with children and their families living in Kabul. The aim of the research was to listen to children's views and to hear children's experiences of daily life. Save the Children and UNICEF intended to gather information from children in order to guide the development of support programs for war-affected children in Afghanistan. The research made use of qualitative methods, and consisted of a series of focus group discussions with children and their families in Kabul. Altogether more than 600 people participated in the group discussions.

Three main topics were explored:

- well being goals for Afghan children;
- the threats children face in achieving well being; and
- the coping resources children already have for dealing with their difficulties.

Using the findings of this research, SC/US is able to make well-informed and well-considered recommendations for the direction of support programs for children in Afghanistan. More than this, we are able to offer insight into the uniqueness of the lives of children in Kabul. Thus, the findings of this project are relevant for all who seek to provide assistance to Afghan children – and war-affected children worldwide – as they come to terms with the challenges they face, and try to make better futures for themselves.

Save the Children's immediate recommendation is for a holistic, child-focused psychosocial approach in designing, implementing, evaluating, and continuing support programs for the great majority of the children of Kabul and all of Afghanistan.

Children's Well Being and Development

Children and their parents in Kabul have clear ideas about what is good for children. These ideas are discussed in terms of children's well being. The standards for children's well being include the ideal behavior and characteristics that children are supposed to have and the achievements that children are supposed to attain.

- **Afghan families want more for their children than mere physical survival; they consider emotional and social development important.**

  Parents hope their children will develop, not just physically, but socially, emotionally and spiritually as well. When children and parents defined their standards for children's well being, they mentioned morality, respect, religious faith, positive feelings, good relationships and correct behavior as well as physical health. Mental well being and happiness are important for children in Kabul, but mental health can only be achieved when other aspects of children's lives are positive.

- **Children require positive and supportive contexts to achieve well being.**

  The most important things that children and parents said have an impact on children's well being are these: children's opportunities for development, children's personal characteristics, and the political situation around them.

- **Children need positive and supportive relationships to achieve well being.**

  Children's families — their parents, grandparents and brothers and sisters — are the most important people in helping children secure well being and happiness. Other influential people for children include their neighbors, teachers, mullahs and friends. It is not enough for children merely to have these people around them. In order for children to secure well being, these people need to give them love and affection, care and protection, discipline, advice and encouragement.

Challenges and Threats for the Children of Kabul

In trying to ensure children's well being, the people of Kabul face many threats and challenges. They not only identified what their difficulties are, but also how they experience problems and what they consider to be the negative impacts of the problems for children.

- **Damaging threats for the children of Kabul are economic, environmental, political, and relational as well as personal.**

  Children identified political repression, war, displacement, poverty, family loss and separation, family tensions, physical illness, danger from the physical environment, heavy and exploitive work, gender-based expectations and peer relationships amongst the things that cause them the greatest worry and concern.

- **The negative consequences of these threats affect children's overall social and emotional well being, including their social development and morality, their behavior and their opportunities.**

  In daily life in Kabul, circumstances hinder children's development, put them at physical and emotional risk, spoil their relationships and cause distress and worry. When talking about war, the worrying consequences children identified were the physical destruction, loss of opportunities for education and threat of displacement as well as the distress of witnessing fighting.

Coping with the Challenges

Children in Kabul are not, however, completely overwhelmed by the difficulties they face. Instead, they and their families have many strengths and resources, which they employ to cope with challenges, lessen the negative impact of those challenges, and reduce suffering. It is these resources that allow children in Kabul to live through difficulties with optimism, and that contribute to their resilience in times of trial.

- **Children's personal attitudes and social relations affect their ability to cope.**

  A range of attitudes that help Afghans come to terms with suffering was identified during the **Children of Kabul** project. Children are taught how to express thankfulness and happiness, and to show morality, faith and courage in times of difficulty so as not to be overwhelmed by the situation. As noted, the encouragement and support children receive from the people around them are also crucial for resiliency. Being able to share suffering with others and to receive material support is essential in enabling children to cope. Children are also better able to cope when there is peace and stability, when their families have economic resources and when the physical environment around them is safe.

- **Families raise their children to cope with difficulties.**

  Parents want their children to grow up with coping skills – to face challenges and suffering with strength. As a result, the standards set for children's well being in Kabul are the very things that will give children the greatest coping resources in times of distress.

- **Some short term coping mechanisms have negative longer term consequences for children.**

  Children identified some coping strategies used by themselves and their parents as having negative repercussions in the long term. Not telling the truth, over-protection, use of physical punishment, violence and taking revenge were identified by children as negative for them in the long term, even if they felt helpful or comforting in their immediate circumstances.

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Recommendations

All the findings of the **Children of Kabul** research project confirm the suitability of a psychosocial framework for planning sustainable support to the majority of Afghan children. Detailed suggestions for such support are these:

- Children's well being can be promoted by enhancing their morality, courage, religious knowledge and faith, responsibility, physical health and cleanliness, good feelings and positive relationships.

- Opportunities which are good for children and should be promoted are education, school, and learning new skills; taking on some household and family responsibility and looking after animals and the environment; play, being with friends, enjoying the physical environment, enjoying social occasions, and offering hospitality and, finally, access to the media (news and entertainment) and expressing their ideas and opinions.

- Relationships with and between children should include spending time together, listening to and answering questions, sharing difficulties, giving advice and encouragement, and solving problems. These relationships should be based on love and comfort, assistance and care, protection, sympathy and empathy. Finally, consistent and non-abusive discipline is important.

- Further, children's existing coping mechanisms, which can be strengthened, include a safe home, a safe neighborhood and a safe, clean place to play. Children also benefit from strengthening their nascent positive approach to hardship and suffering. Religious faith, morality, courage and thankfulness, opportunities to share suffering and problems through good social networks and opportunities to meet and empathize with others in the same situation all contribute to having a positive outlook. Further, good friendships and neighborhood relations, good health, restored and beautiful environments, as well as economic, physical and political security (bringing peace and an end to war) all help children cope with their difficulties.

- The risks to children's well being which must be addressed and reduced or eliminated are these: war and displacement; poverty, which leads to family tensions, heavy and exploitive work by children, and lack of access to schooling; family loss, which can lead to poverty and family separation which leads to anxiety and vulnerability; family tensions, including physical punishment at home and abuse against adopted children; and pressure at schools, including teasing and bullying, and abusive teachers. Other risks include unattended sickness and disability, gender discrimination, early marriage, kidnapping, and busy, unregulated traffic as well as the damaged and dangerous environment.

- The most negative traits which children can develop as a result of experiencing these risks must be addressed. The consequences include drug use, war-like games, disruption of schooling, physical sickness and serious

mental illness, as well as a whole set of negative feelings in children such as lack of courage, lack of morality, negative feelings such as grief, sorrow, anxiety, resentment and fear.

- Negative coping strategies to be addressed are adults' heavy use of physical punishment; overprotection, whereby children are denied freedom of movement and activity; and selective truth telling. Other coping strategies that yield negative results in the long term are violence and revenge, by children and adults alike.

Some of these aims can be achieved in specially targeted programs such as improving the physical environment, promoting children's social interaction and enjoyment, strengthening family structures, improving household livelihood options, preventing child abuse, and improving children's access to information. Others can be achieved by mainstreaming psychosocial support strategies into other fields such as health, education, counseling for children, services for displaced and returnee children, protection and human rights.

In order to achieve these aims, all levels of society — the international community, the government and local communities — need to be involved in psychosocial support strategies.

For Afghan children, psychosocial interventions are recommended with the following policy guidelines:

- **Adopt a holistic approach to providing support to Afghan children**

  Support for Afghan children must tackle the problems that occur in children's daily lives – in their peer relations, families and communities – in order to achieve the best solutions.

- **Root psychosocial support strategies in children's own coping resources**

  Children in Kabul already have ways of dealing with problems. Assistance should start by building on these resources.

- **Focus support for Afghan children on quality as well as quantity**

  Services are not enough; the quality of relationships and interactions with children is equally important.

- **Use participatory approaches with children**

  A participatory approach allows children to express their ideas and opinions, suggest solutions to their own dilemmas, and take action. This allows children to work within their own reality and to take responsibility for solving problems.

- **Base interventions on good information**

  Good information about the expressed concerns and realities of children will decrease the risk of inappropriate action for children.

Moving Research into Action

Following the **Children of Kabul** research, SC/US started psychosocial support projects with children of two of the communities involved in the discussion groups. In both communities SC/US has now established *Child-to-Child* projects. Through these projects children have alerted their parents and elders to take action on particular threats they identified during the research. In both cases the communities have mobilized on behalf of children and have worked to address the concerns of their children. This model of community based capacity for supporting children's psychosocial well being includes children's active participation. It is a model that shows how threats to children's psychosocial well being may be overcome with impact for large numbers of children.

Support for War-affected Children: Guiding Frameworks

The research findings touch upon global debates on the most effective ways to offer support for war-affected children.

Currently, there are two frameworks that guide interventions to give social and emotional support to war-affected children. The first framework, which has been used for children in Rwanda, East Timor and Bosnia, among other nations, is the trauma-focused framework. The second framework is psychosocial. A psychosocial approach has been used in Palestine, Sri Lanka, Angola, and Sierra Leone as well as in East Timor and Bosnia and elsewhere.

The major differences between the two approaches are summarized in the following table:

	Trauma Approach	Psychosocial Approach
Focus	• Impact of war on children's mental health	• Impact of a range of problems on children's social relationships and emotional well being
	• Individual children	• Groups of children in the context of their families and communities
Main features	• Needs assessment is based on psychological and psychiatric measurements of post-traumatic stress disorder	• Needs assessment is based on subjective priorities defined by children and adults
	• Intervention consists of individual children receiving psychological and psychiatric treatment	• Wide range of possible interventions, often community-based, and involving children's groups. Focus on building children's relationships, reestablishing a sense of normality, supporting family life and giving children opportunities for emotional expression
	• Intervention makes the assumption that children can only be healed through technical assistance	• Intervention based on identifying and strengthening children's own coping and resilience resources
	• Generally applicable for minority of war-affected children	• Applicable for all war-affected children
	• High cost and dependent on technical expertise	• Low cost and aims for local level sustainability

The **Children of Kabul** project validates a psychosocial approach for the majority of Afghan children.

Chapter One: An Introduction to the Study

This report contains the opinions of children living in Kabul city, Afghanistan, and the views of their parents and grandparents. The aim of the report is to give a clear picture of the situation of children in Kabul so government organizations, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, community groups, teachers, religious leaders, families, youth and children themselves — all the people who work for the benefit of children — can be aware of the children's concerns and thereby plan for better support to and with children. All the themes and ideas presented in this report are based upon material collected during group discussions with children and parents. In these group discussions participants described what it is like to be a child in Kabul, what some of the biggest concerns for children are and also the things that children enjoy and which make them happy. The situations presented here — both difficult and joyful — are those that children and their families found important to talk about. This report, therefore, offers a unique glimpse into childhood in Kabul as it is experienced and defined by Afghan children and adults themselves.

Understanding Children's Lives

In 2001 Save the Children Federation, Inc. (SC/US) and UNICEF decided they wanted to improve their support for Afghan children. They were particularly concerned with how to offer psychosocial support for children who had been affected by war and displacement. The two agencies already had experience from a program for children who lived in the former Soviet embassy internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Kabul.[1] However, developing programs that offer psychosocial support for war-affected children is a new field, where there is considerable debate about what the most effective interventions are. Broadly understood as activities and programs that address children's social and emotional well being, there are many different opinions about what is meant by psychosocial support. This said, one of the most important lessons learned in this field over the last ten years is that the people who are the beneficiaries will have their own ways of understanding and coping with their experience. In other words, psychosocial well being is always contextual, and the context is people's personal experiences, relationships, values, culture and understandings.[2]

Save the Children and UNICEF, therefore, hoped they could improve their work for Afghan children by learning more of how children themselves experience and understand their situations. The two agencies thus decided to undertake a research project to answer these central questions:

- What do Afghan children and their families consider important for children's well being and development?

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[1] A full review of this project has been published Laura Arnston "Review of Psychosocial Support Activities in the Former Soviet Embassy Compound IDP Camp" Kabul (2001): Save the Children.

[2] To follow the debates about psychosocial programs in more detail, see "Rethinking the Trauma of War" Petty, C & Bracken, P. (1996): Save the Children. "Promoting Psychosocial Well Being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement" (1996): Save the Children Alliance. See also Annex One.

- What are the situations that make it difficult for families and children to achieve children's well being?
- When Afghan children face difficulties, what are the resources they use to cope ?

These questions were asked to provide information about the lives of children in Kabul which would, in turn, encourage programming based on the realities of Afghan children's and their caregivers' lives.

In order to fully achieve this aim, the most important guiding principle for the research project was for it to be a consultation with children whereby children would be encouraged to express their values and experiences. This was considered important because, although adults can talk about children's well being, children too have ideas about their situations. Children are very aware of what makes them happy, what makes them sad and what they want for their development. Once children's ideas are taken into account, agencies can design support activities and projects that fit with what children themselves know and think is important, thus making efforts to help children closer to their own realities and priorities.

In other words, Save the Children and UNICEF conducted the research from a child rights-based perspective. A rights-based perspective sees children not as passive recipients of support but as active individuals who play an important role in their own development, relationships and protection. A rights-based perspective means the difference between saying, "This child is a victim who needs help," and "This child is a survivor who has the potential to help herself." Such an approach to working with children is advocated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), where one of the most important rights within the convention is children's right to participation. Both UNICEF and Save the Children use the CRC as a fundamental guide for their work and hence for this research project. The researchers wanted to look at how children were already helping themselves, and at who else was already helping them, in order to know how best to support children. Despite all the challenges for children in Afghanistan, it is evident that families have found ways of getting on with their lives despite their problems. An important part of the research was to develop a better understanding of how children in Kabul manage to sustain themselves through extraordinarily difficult times.

Research Design

Location

The decision to conduct research in Kabul was based on the fact that high levels of poverty, displacement and the wars' impact in the city made it reasonable to assume that the threats to children's well being in Kabul were great. Kabul thus provided a suitable location for exploring the impact of war and other challenges on children's well being. It was thought that this would lead to nationally relevant lessons about implementation and outcomes as well. In addition, both agencies had experience in programs in the city, and wanted to build upon this existing capacity.

Target groups

The CRC defines a child as a person between 0 and 18 years of age. In this project, the research focused on children between 7 and 18, who were the intended age target for future psychosocial support programs. The research team decided to talk also to parents and caregivers for two important reasons. First, caregivers and parents are often the most important resource for children's well being and development, so it was important to look at how parents and adults supported their children. Second, it was also going to be important to understand adults' and children's different opinions of children's well being in order to help parents and adults begin to see things from children's points of view.

Research Methods

Qualitative methods

Learning about people's ideas, experiences and life histories requires qualitative rather than quantitative research. Accordingly, the research team decided to organize focus group discussions and encourage participants to discuss issues and topics that would reveal their experiences. The team designed questions and activities to promote this.

The benefits of participatory research with children

To learn the truth about children's lives and experiences in Kabul, the researchers knew they would be asking children to reflect upon personal and sensitive realities. Since there is now experience with non-intrusive ways to help children express themselves on difficult subjects, the team used this experience to design activities for the research with children.[3] Some important points the team chose to follow were these:

- It helps children and young people talk about their ideas if they have activities to do and participate in. For example, they can give their ideas through drawings, acting, story telling, or making models. If children are enjoying themselves and having fun during the activities, this is an indication that they feel at ease with the methods being used.
- It helps children and young people talk about their ideas if facilitators start with easy questions and activities, which help them relax, and then move to more sensitive and personal topics.
- It helps children and young people talk about their ideas if facilitators have kind manners and good listening skills.

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[3] For further information on doing participatory research with children see:
Boyden, J. and Ennew, J. (eds.), (1997) *Children in Focus - A Manual for Participatory Research with Children.* Save the Children Sweden Publication.
Dynamix Ltd (2002) *Participation—Spice It Up! Practical Tools for Engaging Children and Young People in Planning and Consultations.* Save the Children UK.
Kirby, P. (1999) *Involving Young Researchers: How to Enable Young People to Design and Conduct Research.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
Richman, N. (1993) *Communicating with Children. Development Manual 2.* Save the Children, London.

- It helps children and young people talk if they do not feel they have to give a correct or specific answer; rather that all their ideas and opinions are respected.

From these points, the team designed a series of participatory activities to encourage children and young people to express their opinions and ideas.

Methods with children

This research is based on work with 43 groups of children, every group attending six sessions. Each group had 10 to 15 children age 7 to 13. Each session lasted two hours, and involved a number of participatory activities that encourage the children to relax and enjoy themselves and to express their opinions.

Children's Ideas Project

The Body Activity (Session Five)

Objective: To encourage children to talk about their feelings
Activity: Children choose one child from the group, who lies down on a large piece of paper. Another child draws around the body of the child who is lying on the paper, which makes a picture of a life-sized child. The children in the group then decorate the body, after which the facilitator points to different parts of the body and asks, "What do you like to see?" "What don't you like to see?" and "What do you like to hear?" "What don't you like to hear?" The facilitator does this for all parts of the body — eyes (seeing), ears (listening), nose (smelling), mouth (eating and speaking), head (thinking), hands (doing), feet (going), bottom (sitting), and heart (feeling). The facilitator then asks, "Where do you feel worry and fear?" and "What makes you feel worry and fear?" and "When you feel afraid what helps you feel better?" and "When you feel worried what makes you feel better?" The facilitator then asks all of the children to tell a story about a time when they were worried or afraid and someone or something helped them to feel better. The facilitator writes all the children's ideas on the paper around the body.

This part of the research was called the *Children's Ideas Project,* and it was introduced to the children as such to assure children that their ideas and opinions were important. The *Children's Ideas Project* was facilitated with the *Children's Ideas Box,* which contained all the information and supplies required for the activities. The box was also used to collect children's ideas — in stories, drawings, tape recordings and charts — at the end of the project.

The six sessions covered the following topics:

One	Introduction of the project, promoting children's ownership of the project and the project box
Two	Children's ideas about families and relationships
Three	Children's ideas about risks and dangers
Four	Children's ideas about good and bad events and situations
Five	Children's ideas about their bodies and feelings
Six	Children's ideas about their work and activities; feedback and close of the group

Children's Ideas Project

Happy Day/Sad Day Picture Drawing (Session 4)

Objective: To encourage children to talk about events that made them happy, and ones that made them sad.

Activity: The children are given pieces of paper and colored pencils. The facilitator asks the children to draw a picture of a day they were very happy on one side of the paper, and on the other side to draw a picture of a day they were very sad. The facilitator then asks the children to explain their pictures and the stories involved, and then writes it all down on the child's paper. For the *Sad Day* story the facilitator asks the children what made them feel better on that day, and writes those things down, too.

"The day when my sister got married, I was so happy".

Girl, age 8

Methods with youth and adults

As well as methods for the sessions with children, the research team developed methods to use with the groups of adolescents, parents and grandparents. These were less activity based than those used with children, but also promoted conversations and sharing. The methods included: case study stories to start discussion on child-focused topics, drawing time lines to put participants' experiences in historical perspective, and asking people to reflect on their own experiences.

Piloting the methods

At the beginning of the project, the team spent six weeks piloting the research methods, questions and activities. They worked in two communities in Kabul where SC/US had existing programs and relationships. They worked with two groups of children and two groups of mothers in each place. The purpose of the piloting period was to learn which questions and which activities best encourage people to talk about their concerns and ideas. If the group participants did not understand a question or activity, or if it did not help them to talk about their lives, then the question or activity was dropped. The team was especially careful in choosing words to explain the project and ask questions. They tried to use words that all participants would understand, and to be consistent in word use.

Project Implementation

SC/US staff members facilitated all group discussions. In time, the team trained 17 additional facilitators to conduct the children's sessions. All group discussions were tape recorded, then transcribed and translated. The team started its work in August 2001, but the project was suspended following the events of September 11th that year, and restarted in January 2002. Information collection for the research ended in June 2002.

The numbers of people involved in the project were:

Interviewees	Number of Groups	Number of Sessions	Number of Participants	Girls	Boys	Districts of Kabul
Children age 7-13	32	192	321	168	152	7,5,6,12,11,8
Children age 13-18	11	11	116	69	47	7,5,6,12,11,8
Fathers	3	3	24	-	-	5,6,7
Mothers	11	26	143	-	-	5,6,7,8,11,12
Grandmothers	3	3	23	-	-	5,6,7
Grandfathers	3	3	25	-	-	5,6,7
Total	63	238	652	237	199	-

Chapter Two: Children's Well Being and Development Values and Priorities

Children and adults in Kabul have clear ideas about what is good for children. In this chapter those ideas are discussed in terms of children's well being: i.e., their overall contentment and all the things that help them have fulfilled and successful childhoods. The ideas expressed about children's well being described the *ideal* that parents, and children themselves, would like children to obtain; they expressed *standards* for what is important in children's lives; they expressed the hoped-for *achievements* of children, and described the *qualities* children should develop.

Children's well being is not considered as just a physical phenomenon. The parents and children of Kabul want more for their lives than merely being alive and having food, clothing and shelter. As participants talked about how they would, ideally, like themselves and their children to be, they mentioned aspects of behavior, relationships, and beliefs. For people in Kabul, children's well being, therefore, includes social, emotional and religious as well as physical qualities.

There was remarkable consistency in the ideas expressed about children's well being: between study participants in different locations in Kabul and between children and adults. This suggests that these values for children's well being and development are not just the isolated ideas of a few people but are strong priorities that Afghan children and adults hold and try to maintain. Despite all the difficulties Kabul residents have lived through, they still know what they want for themselves and their children, and have high expectations in what they want children to be and achieve. They are also clear about what they want children to avoid because of negative impacts on their well being.

The first part of this chapter explores what children and adults in Kabul consider to be good for children's well being, what they want to see promoted in children's lives and the values they believe children should hold, as well as what should be avoided. The second part considers what influences children in developing these characteristics. The third part looks in more detail at the kinds of relationships considered important for children's positive development and well being.

What is Considered Good and Important for Children's Well Being

Tarbia

The difference between a child with good tarbia *and a child with bad* tarbia *is like the difference between a complete house and a destroyed house. If a mother and father pay attention to a child's* tarbia, *the child will grow and develop into a useful person. If not, they will grow up useless and will be a disadvantage for their family and country — just like a destroyed and ravaged home."*

Women's group discussion

One of the strongest concepts to emerge in discussions about what is important for children's well being was *tarbia,* which refers to children's manners and the quality of their relationships with others. Children who have good *tarbia* (*ba tarbia,* or with *tarbia*) are polite, obedient, respectful, sociable and peaceful. They know how to eat, sit, dress and pray properly. They do not fight unnecessarily and they do as their parents suggest. In contrast children with bad *tarbia* (*be tarbia,* or without *tarbia*) are rude, antisocial and argumentative. Children often described drug users as *be tarbia*. Children said that the use of hashish made people violent and argumentative; they also saw it as an economic risk, draining money away from other more important uses. Parents often made a link between the disruption of *tarbia* early in life and boys using hashish later in life. At the most extreme, children who are *be tarbia* become a danger to themselves and their society.

"*Tarbia* is everything — the people who get on well with their life have good *tarbia* and the people who don't get on well with their life don't have good *tarbia,* and all this comes from the family."

Grandmothers' group discussion

There are four especially important parts of good *tarbia:* good and clean language, respect for elders and parents, bodily cleanliness, and hospitality.

In the research discussion groups, children were particularly preoccupied with good and bad words. They explained that children with bad *tarbia* use a lot of bad words — words with rude meanings as well as normal words used in rude or inappropriate ways. For example, undue verbal familiarity to an elder or senior is considered insulting, as is commenting on someone's bodily appearance — especially a woman's.

"If you give children good *tarbia* they will keep that until the end of their lives."

Fathers' group discussion

Respect for parents and elders can be shown both through appropriate language and body language as well as behavior — like carrying out duties for elders or seniors. Cleanliness is also considered very important for children's social development because children who are clean show they are taking care of themselves and are being taken care of; and, if they are clean, they are more likely to be healthy. Finally, hospitality is considered a vital part of good *tarbia*: children should be able to welcome guests and sit with them in a polite manner.

"Girls' *tarbia* is different from boys' [*tarbia*]. For girls we say, 'Don't come out without a veil!' and 'Don't look at boys because, even if you are caught talking to a small boy, people will make a lot of words and rumors about you!'"

Mothers' group discussion

Ba tarbia is seen as gender specific. Children, parents and grandparents considered that there were extra qualities that a girl should display as part of being *ba tarbia*. Modesty (for example, keeping the eyes down if outside the home, not making eye contact with boys or looking around, and keeping the head covered) was stressed as an ideal attribute for girls.

Boys said that they would often tease a girl if she were not following such precepts, which also serves as a reinforcement of good *tarbia* among girls, who said they had a fear of being teased and talked about with bad words about their behavior. Girls admitted that they are very aware of the attitude of boys towards them, and said they often try to modify their behavior so they will not be unduly teased or taunted by boys. They talked about how important it was to have good *tarbia* so they would avoid such insults. Thus, the attitude of their peers influences them to develop good *tarbia*. And, this is a clear example of how the degree of *tarbia* shown by children determines how the people around them react to them.

People are pleased with and proud of children who are *ba tarbia* and scathing of those who are *be tarbia*. This is another reason why so much emphasis is placed on *tarbia;* not only so that children will behave well, but also so they will receive praise from those around them. People in Kabul consider that, by pleasing others and receiving praise, children will be happier and have a more fulfilled life. Having good tarbia is thus a means to achieving the support and approval of others.

"I tell my daughter, 'Don't look here and there,' and my husbands says to her, 'If I see you outside with boys, I'll kill you,' and I tell my daughter that he is telling the truth."

Mothers' group discussion

However, *tarbia* does not just refer to children's actions and attitudes; it is a moral quality. Children with good *tarbia* behave or appear well because they know the difference between right and wrong; because they have morality. Knowledge of morality comes from the knowledge of religion. Thus, *tarbia* has its roots in religion. As children learn about religion, so they learn about right and wrong, and this is the basis for developing good *tarbia*. Parents will use lessons from the Koran and from Islamic teaching to reinforce good *tarbia* among their children.

Courage

Apart from *tarbia*, parents said that one of the qualities they wanted their children to develop during childhood is courage (*delair*). They said that children need to be courageous to cope with the outside world. Some parents felt that facing difficult and frightening events promoted children's courage. Many parents considered that this generation of children is particularly courageous because they have passed through so many difficulties.

Not surprisingly courage is also a gender-specific quality. Mothers, for example, said that they wanted to promote courageous behavior in their sons, but they were careful not to push their daughters too far because a girl with too much courage — addressing people freely or walking around outside the home — could be considered crazy or *be tarbia*, and could easily be insulted or get into difficulties.

Religious faith

"First of all we teach children their Kalima, *and then how to behave with people. Then children should learn to say hello and how to respect others. Then the child should learn the words for the parents ('mother' and 'father') and then the child should learn to eat with their right hand because it is not good to eat with the left. Then the child should learn how to put on shoes."*

Mothers' group discussion

Religious faith and knowledge of religious practice are considered important for children. As well as being taught to pray — such as being able to say the *Kalima* — children are also taught how to prepare for their parents' praying by fetching water for ablutions and laying out the prayer mat. These are the first steps to ensure children develop religious practices. After this, children are encouraged, and they themselves feel it is important, to listen to and read the Koran, to attend mosque and to follow the religious advice of the *mullah* and their parents. Children who can recite the Koran are particularly praised.

"Our children should be always busy. My father-in-law advises me to not let my children be unoccupied for even five minutes. It was the same when I was young; as soon as we came home from school my aunt said, 'You have no companion' [meaning that they didn't have any work] and so she sent us out to irrigate the fields or put the hens back in their houses. When we see that children have finished every task, we can tell them just to get their note books and write some sheets of paper, whether this is needed or not, because otherwise the bad companion [having nothing to do] will take our children."

Mothers' group discussion

Household responsibility

Parents who were involved in this research said that it is appropriate for children to help run the household. Parents and children alike believe that the importance of housework for children is four-fold. First, it helps children develop responsibility toward their family. Second, it helps them learn the skills they will need to run a household of their own one day – girls as wives; boys as husbands.

Since marriage is the end to which most Kabul girls are looking in their development towards adulthood, there is special emphasis on ensuring the marriageability of girls as part of their well being. To be considered marriageable, girls should have good household skills, some craft skill to bring money into the home and, most importantly, a blameless reputation.

Third, in the process of learning household tasks, children develop and exhibit good *tarbia* by respecting the people in their home, by obeying their parents and by carrying out commands. Fourth, parents said that housework is more than just an economic or training exercise for children; they felt it had value to keep children busy and out of trouble:

"It is good to be our age because we can work and help our family to make money."

Youth boys' group discussion

Children are very aware of the contributions they can make to their families. Many children are certainly glad about helping in household tasks although, as discussed in the next chapter, the actual jobs they do can be a source of stress and anxiety for them.

"Now we are older, we can think about money and how to earn it."

Youth boys' group discussion

Feelings

"See the color; ask the feeling."

Women's group discussion

Children and their parents want children to have positive feelings because there is a clear link in people's minds between positive feelings and physical well being. Feelings are not just a state of emotional or mental health, but are

"I sell my embroidery and I contribute to my family, and this makes me glad because my father's salary is not enough."

Youth girls' group discussion

"When the person remembers the awful memories he feels pain. When he thinks a lot and puts pressure on his head, it affects him physically and mentally. He goes into a condition that no one knows. He goes mad (*dewana*). When he gets better and his condition becomes well, he still feels a kind of pain in his head."

Mothers' group discussion

also experienced in and through the body.[4] A child who has good and positive feelings will be healthy, while a child who has negative feelings will be simultaneously sick and weak. Aches, pains, thinness, tiredness, ulcers and other stomach problems are especially associated with negative feelings. In other words, people in Kabul understand that negative feelings are somatised — they result in physical conditions. It is, therefore, considered vitally important for children's well being that they are protected from negative feelings, from the ill health that these will cause and from the situations that cause these feelings.

People in Kabul have a very rich vocabulary for understanding both positive and negative feelings. The main positive feelings that are important for children in Kabul are happiness, calmness and freshness. Happiness is recognized through a child's expression: a happy child will smile and laugh and have positive behavior, appreciate the things and people around her and will be more likely to develop well. Calmness refers to a sense of inner peace. Children who are calm will not display aggressive behavior, they will listen to instructions carefully, they will not be careless or impetuous and they will approach difficulties and problems calmly without panic. Freshness refers to a sense of energy. A child in Kabul who is fresh is alive and well, enthusiastic and healthy, rested and able to carry out responsibilities.

"When the pressure becomes too much the nerves extend all over the body. That causes pain. At night if I remember my dead husband and cry, when I get up the next morning, I will feel pain all over my body."

Mothers' group discussion

Children who have positive feelings show it in their attitude towards other people and in their attitude about the future. Contented children are generous and agreeable; others like to be with them because they share the good things they have and they are pleasant and enjoyable company. They are also hopeful.

"During the war time I got psychological problems (*taklef rowany*). At first I clutched my heart because I really had pain. When I went to the doctor I told him that I had pain all over my body."

Mothers' group discussion

Besides having positive feelings, it is important that children try to avoid negative feelings. In Dari (the main language of the research participants) there is an especially strong vocabulary of words that describe states of sorrow, distress and anxiety.[5] Among the strongest concepts are suffering (*gham*) and resentment (*ochdar*). *Gham* is the feeling associated with bad events and situations, and the suffering that is entailed in them, especially grief and loss. *Ochdar* occurs when people dwell on the bad things that have happened to them, and feel resentful and revengeful about what has happened. *Ochdar* is particularly related to jealousy and not being able to come to terms with other people having a better condition of life. Research participants said that the result of *ochdar* is the development of a cancer-like growth in the heart. This can be felt physically, like a rock.

"If bad things happen to children, maybe they will have a nice life but still the memories and resentment of what happened will stay for the rest of their lives."

Grandfathers' group discussion

Other negative feelings are those that come from a state of fear (*tars*) and one of shock (*shock asaby*), which occur when something sudden and terribly frightening happens. Children, according to discussion group members, have negative feelings when they have worry and anxiety (*tashwish*), and when they are lonely. Participants said that children who have negative feelings have anti-social behavior: they do not talk to other children, sit by themselves and do not enjoy playing. Further, children with negative feelings are said

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[4] For this reason the team tended to use the word *feeling* rather than *emotion* in the research because *feeling* better captures the link between physical and emotional well being.

[5] This vocabulary proved so rich that extra attention was paid to understanding these words in group discussions with women. A list of words for feelings of sorrow and anxiety is given in Appendix Two.

to be unaware, meaning that they do not take care of their appearance: they do not clean themselves, or dress smartly, or brush their hair.

Children with negative feelings also think too much rather than talk or socialize. The thoughts might be memories of the past or worries about the future. Similarly, children who have negative feelings lack energy, and they are always tired and hard to motivate. Children suffering with serious negative feelings are said to behave nonsensically — to act mad by talking to themselves, running out into the street and engaging in risky and dangerous behavior.

"Some thieves killed the brother-in-law of my daughter some days ago, and now his brother has got serious *ochdar* and doesn't even want to put on his clothes and has really bad behavior with everyone. He says, 'Until I find that person who killed my brother and kill him, I will not be calm.' He has a very big growth in his heart and even has bleeding."

Mothers' group discussion

Physical well being

"Being healthy is very important to our happiness."

Boys' group discussion

Physical health is central to children's well being, and both parents and children stressed the importance of children's physical protection. Physical well being is highly valued because of its links to emotional well being: a healthy child is more likely to be a happy and fresh child, and a happy and fresh child is more likely to be healthy child. Physical well being also has social consequences; healthy children are more likely to be able to interact with their friends and fulfill their household responsibilities. Being unwell is a physical experience but also a social one, because it puts pressure on family economies and relationships. Finally, physical well being has a moral character; clean, healthy children show that they have good *tarbia*, are well looked after and likely to be praised and accepted by others. Thus, in Kabul, anything that causes children injury, sickness, disability and even to get dirty is considered threatening.

Influences on Children's Well Being

Children's *Happy Day* stories

"This picture is about Eid. I am very happy. The men are going to the mosque to pray and we are visiting our relatives. All the fathers and mothers are at home. I have new clothes. Of course I feel happy."

Girl, age 8

In one of the research activities, children were asked to draw pictures of days when they were happy, and to explain what about the day made them happy. The children's explanations were very revealing in terms of what influences their well being. Occasions where children were celebrating events such as Eid, weddings and the New Year featured very highly in the children's *Happy Day* stories. Children said they particularly enjoyed these days because they were times when all the family was together. On such days children are shown special love through presents and food. Other common happy day stories, which gave credit to the importance of family relationships, were those about family picnics, visiting relatives and welcoming relatives returning from refuge abroad.

Alongside good family relations, physical surroundings also appeared in children's descriptions of happiness: in stories of picnics, but also in the enjoyment they had of fruit and animals. There was often a close link made in children's stories between the physical surroundings and their ability to fulfill their roles and responsibilities well. Children in Kabul take on many tasks for their households; they feel proud of what they do to contribute to their families. Children said that when these roles go well — when they are easily able to collect water, or when a chicken in their care has chicks — they feel especially happy. But, it is often the physical conditions around them that determine how well children can fulfill these tasks, and so it is not surprising that children emphasized this in their stories.

Children also emphasized opportunities to go to school, to play and to get new clothes because these were times of interaction with peers — studying and playing with peers or being admired by peers — but, more significantly, because these opportunities were signs of their own education or appearance.

Happy Day Activity

Most commonly stated *Happy Day* stories from a total of 43 different story themes:

1. Eid
2. relative's wedding
3. going to school
4. playing
5. New Year
6. visit to/from relatives
7. getting new clothes
8. going on a picnic
9. the end of the Taliban
10. got a new animal in the house
11. return of self/relatives from abroad
12. chicken had chicks
13. a lot of water in the pipes/river
14. someone gave them an apple
15. life before being displaced

Finally, children's stories noted the impact of history on their happiness. For example, some of the celebrations children enjoy — wedding parties and New Year celebrations — were reinstated with the fall of the Taliban. Children talked about the end of the Taliban era as being a time of happiness. Likewise, children described life before displacement, and the return of relatives from refuge abroad, as times of joy. So, it is clear that children's experiences *have* been influenced to some extent by wider political circumstances.

The concept of well being for children in Kabul is a larger and more complex one than happiness alone. Nevertheless, even on this specific topic, themes emerge which are consistent across all the research: in Kabul, children's well being — in this case their happiness — is gained through historical events which change things for the better; a conducive environment enabling them to fulfill roles and responsibilities; opportunities for self development and, most important of all, relationships with other people, especially their families. In other words, children do not achieve well being in isolation from the world around them, and it is children's relationships with others that emerged as the strongest influencing factors.

Achieving Well Being and Development Through Positive Relationships

Having stressed that relationships with others are crucial for their well being, children and their parents also identified *who* is important to them and *what kinds* of interactions are essential.

The People Who Are Important for Children

Families and homes

"A family is like a strong chain, every member linked to each other."

Women's group discussion

In all group discussions with children and parents, participants said that family relations were most important for children's well being. This understanding was particularly strong in the case of *tarbia*. As the quotes below suggest, both parents and children saw children's *tarbia* as most directly affected and passed on by their families.

> "When the child gets good *tarbia* from the home, s/he will be good and polite in school also. The *tarbia* that a child gets from the family, they can't get from school. When the mother puts her child under her breast and says, 'Lalo, lalo,' that is the beginning of *tarbia* because slowly the child will learn how to say 'hello' and respect others, in particular their elders. Then the mother says to her child to respect elders and be kind with smaller children. From this the child will learn good *tarbia*, and by the time they get to school they don't need training because we have a saying that '*tarbia* is more important than education.'"
>
> Women's group discussion

> "Giving *tarbia* lasts all the days of a person's life. After a while they know their left from right hand but they still need the support of their families."
>
> Fathers' group discussion

> "A person has bad *tarbia* if his or her grandparents had bad *tarbia*; this will pass to the person's parents and then to them."
>
> Girl, age 6

"All family members are important because we can like them all, but a mother is most important because she knows our secrets best."

Youth girls' group discussion

What both children and parents are referring to here is a kind of learning that is very different from the academic, knowledge-based learning that children are understood to receive at school. Good *tarbia*, as explained earlier, refers to socialization according to a moral code and an understanding of what is good and important. And, it requires a learning process. Children do not automatically inherit good *tarbia;* instead, it is passed to them actively, and they must be encouraged to take it up. The techniques through which children can acquire good tarbia are discussed below. Both children and parents understood that they were more likely to receive good *tarbia* if their own family members were positive role models. Children's good *tarbia* was also seen as a reward from God for those parents and grandparents who themselves had good *tarbia*.

"Grandparents have a very important role in the *tarbia* of children because grandparents take care of children's clothes, also maybe the parents work outside so the child is always with the grandparent."

Grandfathers' group discussion

When research participants talked about families, they were first and foremost talking about parents and children. Mothers are especially important for children's *tarbia* and general well being, since mothers are seen as children's primary companions in their early years and because a mother is more likely to be at home with her children than a father. However, grandparents also see themselves as very important for children's *tarbia* because they have the time to sit with and teach children. Children also said that the protection and assistance they got from older siblings was very important for their well being.

"A bad mother goes outside and talks with men, and her children are allowed to go any place they want."

Boy, age 11

Beyond immediate family relations, children and parents also talked about how important *wasta* (family connections) are for children's well being. A family with strong *wasta* — family members in good jobs and with good connections — is more likely to be able to withstand suffering and economic hardship, to be more hopeful about the future and to be able to develop them a positive manner.

"A good sister does not peep from the door, and she wears a big *chador*, and she doesn't look at men, and she doesn't go on the roof."

Boy, age 9

The family house is important to children's well being. It was very clear in the research that people saw the home as a place of care and protection from the dangers of the outside world. Parents and children often made a big distinction between the private and protective inside world of the home and the public and dangerous outside. Mothers in particular seemed to worry about their children being outside the home. Many mothers stated that they would really like to keep their children inside the home, where they can keep an eye on them, not even allowing their children to go outside to play or shop.

"A bad sister goes to parks with boys, and takes pictures with them."

Boy, age 11

At the same time, it must be considered that there are some differences in the degree to which children are protected within the home according to age and gender. For Kabul boys, growing up starts with life centered on the home, with occasional outside trips to do chores. But, in time, as they go to school regularly or take on paying jobs on the street, boys spend more time away from home. Indeed, both children and parents understood that part of what it is to be a boy or young man is to know about the outside world, to be involved in its problems and to take on responsibility within it. In contrast, for girls, the time they spend outside the home generally decreases as they get older. While they are young, girls also collect water and firewood, play outside and go to school. But, as Kabul girls reach adolescence, there is more emphasis placed on their protection within the home, and it becomes increasingly rare for them to go out. Indeed, there is a high level of social pressure on girls to conduct themselves appropriately and stay within the home. It is noticeable

from boys' comments on what is good and proper behavior for a girl, that girls and women outside the home is something they do not generally accept. Boys thus play a part in enforcing the idea and the practice that girls stay within the home.

"A good family is one where they love each other, they have good relationships with their neighbors, their children have good behavior and study, and the children don't say bad words."

Girl, age 7

It should be noted that if girls and women do leave the house, they go in the company of a relative, and often fully covered. Those adolescent girls who go independently to school or to work are rare exceptions.

Important people in the community

"A teacher is like a parent."

Youth girls' group discussion

"Huma jan is our neighbor and she is a very good woman. She never closes her door to anyone and never gets bored of her neighbors coming to ask her things. Because of this, she has children with very good tarbia, *and we are pleased that she is our neighbor."*

Girls' group discussion, IDP camp

"I love going to school, and in the morning I just wait impatiently to go ... ."

Youth girls' group discussion

Apart from family members, children also have important relationships with their neighbors, teachers, *mullahs* and friends.

Neighbors are one of the most important sets of people children come into contact with, and children in the research were obviously very influenced by them. Parents explained that not only did children see what their neighbors were doing, they often copy their behavior and this influences their *tarbia* for better or worse. Children explained how they often go to their neighbors for help. In their spare time they play with their neighbor's children, and neighbors often provide childcare and assistance in children's housework tasks.

"Those children with good *tarbia* hear their parents advice and go to the mosque and take turns in the housework."

Boy, age 10

In addition to neighborhoods and neighbors, schools and teachers play an important part in children's well being in Kabul. Children often value the relationships they have with teachers because they see teachers as people to look up to, and who can advise them and even solve their problems. Some children said that when they had problems at home, their teachers were good friends and advocates to whom they could talk about their problems. In addition, by influencing children's learning, teachers are encouraging children to develop their knowledge and their ability to succeed in the world. People see education as creating a path to a job and, therefore, going to school as a source of hope and security for the future.

"A good family never fights with each other [or] with their neighbors, and they have good and clean children with good *tarbia*, and the children go to the mosque."

Boy, age 8

Some children who were not going to school and were working had the same attitude towards the adults with whom they were working and learning from an as apprentices. Children viewed these adults as important to their future security and development, particularly their ability to make economic contributions to their families.

"When you don't understand a question in school, a good friend helps you out."

Girl, age 12

The importance of morality for children's well being has already been discussed. Moral development is closely related to knowledge of religion and, therefore, mosques and *mullahs* have an important role in children's lives. In Kabul, both girls and boys often attend mosque for religious lessons and listening to the Koran, and this is their basis for learning right from wrong and good from bad.

"A good friend invites us to his home and does not use bad words and never insults his friends, neighbors and classmates."

Boy, age 11

Finally, the children of Kabul have important relationships with friends from their neighborhood, their school and their extended families. One obvious

part of being and having a friend is that friends have fun playing with each other. But Kabul children mentioned other qualities in friendship. They noted, for example, that friends influence each other's *tarbia*, since friends learn and copy behavior, whether good or bad, from each other. Friends learn language and attitudes from each other and are influenced to be polite or rude by their peers, especially if their peers tease them about behavior that they (the peers) consider inappropriate. Friends can influence each other to good and moral actions or to immoral and destructive behavior. Good friends are also hospitable — they invite their friends into their homes and open up their own family life to friends through the fun and enjoyment of social occasions such as weddings and picnics.

Methods of Socialization

"I like my father because he always asks me what I learned in school each day. He asks me, 'What did you study; what did you learn?' He advises me not to fight with people, and that when people say bad words to me I should not do anything or respond to them."

Boy, age 11

Those involved in the **Children of Kabul** project repeatedly stated that it is not enough for children merely to have people around them. Instead, as noted earlier, they believe that children need an active process of socialization and training. Children's relationships must take on certain qualities to have a positive impact. This section describes how people in Kabul believe children should be influenced to develop the qualities important for their well being and development.

Advice and encouragement

"Our neighbors are not good because their children are always knocking on our door and annoying us. When we go to open the door, they escape saying bad words towards us. How can I explain to you how bad they are? I am just saying that they are very bad people. Whenever the children are doing these bad things, their mother is not advising them or telling them 'What you are doing is not good,' or punishing them. They are just looking to see where their children are, but not what they are doing."

Girl, age 13, IDP camp

"A bad father sleeps all day because he smokes hashish. When his children come to him he does not have time to advise them. He just says, 'Leave me alone!'"

Mixed children's group discussion

A very strong theme emerging from children's discussions was their appreciation of people who advised and encouraged them. Advice and encouragement were often the indicators by which children defined good or bad social relationships around them; they liked the people who gave them good advice and encouragement, and they did not appreciate those who did not. Children appreciated the time parents, brothers, sisters, teachers and friends could give to listen to their problems, ask them about their lives and advise them with solutions. Parents and grandparents also said that advice and encouragement are very important for children; they saw these as a key part of achieving good *tarbia* for their children. And, they understood that it was only if children were advised on what was good, and encouraged in positive behavior, that they would learn right from wrong and come to know what kind of attributes to develop.

"We should observe what children learn at school. If it is positive, we should encourage them to keep on with this, but if it is negative, we should not allow them to repeat it. Then we recommend them to pay attention to their lessons."

Grandfathers' group discussion

Care and protection

"A good brother encourages us to go to the mosque and to school. He requests the teacher, 'Please take care of my brother; if he doesn't come to school or if he doesn't study his lessons, please inform me and I will take care of it.'"

Boy, age 9

As well as advice and encouragement, another aspect of children's relationships, which contributes to their well being, is that the people around them give children care and protection. It was noticeable that children felt it important to have a guardian or protector in their lives. The care and protection offered by such people involves the supply of material goods (food, clothing, shelter) as well as physical protection and security, and is primarily the responsibility of the family. Discussions revealed that, ideally, fathers (sometimes assisted by older brothers) should provide children with clothes, food, medicines and school materials. Mothers (sometimes assisted by older sisters) were seen to be responsible for the provision of cleanliness and meals. Without these material goods and protection, children felt vulnerable.

Likewise, children valued their peers. Peers offer protection through solidarity in times of trouble. One of the key indicators children gave for friendship was the ability to keep secrets, which they confided to each other when they had problems. They appreciated that they could trust their friends with knowledge of their difficulties and expect some hope of a solution from them.

"A good friend is one who is close to you. If he has an enemy, he requests you to accompany him everywhere and says, 'Come with me because I have an enemy.'"

Boy, age 7

As described here, care and protection are important because they mean that a child has a defensive shield of people who take it as their duty to help a child avoid difficulty and danger, solve a child's problems if they arise, and mediate between a child and the outside world to help maintain his or her well being and development.

Training and discipline

"If we beat children with a stick, it helps them to understand everything."

Mothers' group discussion

When parents and children talked about the training of children in *tarbia*, they referred to a process in which children's behavior is monitored and constantly improved. This training responsibility lies mainly with parents. Some parents even talked about having a training timetable for children so every minute of their day was regulated and there was a constant guard on how their *tarbia* and character were developing.

This training is conducted with advice and encouragement, and discipline is also an important component. Parents referred to physical punishment as one of the most effective means of disciplining children. They said that they would use physical punishment when children did something that was not seen as good *tarbia* or good for their development or protection. They did this in the hope that the punishment would teach them not to repeat the action or attitude. Punishment can be heavy, and parents and children commented on the frequent use of beating in their homes and also in schools. Although children said they hated receiving physical punishment themselves, they appeared to see beating as an effective, if painful, means of learning a lesson. And, often in the research discussions, children recommended that one of their peers or neighbor's children should be beaten in order to improve their *tarbia*.

Love

"A good father loves and hugs his children and provides all their needs."

Girl, age 6

Parents in the research saw enforcing discipline and training through punishment as being in their children's best interests; a means of encouraging children to learn important life skills. At the same time, they identified a softer side to helping children achieve well being: demonstrating love to children. Parents stated how important it was for children to feel loved through being hugged and through receiving gifts. Parents said they often rewarded children with small gifts such as sweets and new clothes, both to make them feel better when they were upset but also to encourage them in good behavior. Throughout the research children affirmed how much they appreciated receiving gifts from their family and friends, and being held and hugged by them. Many of the children's *Happy Day* stories feature occasions when they had been given gifts and had spent time with their parents. Ultimately, however, parents saw the need for a good balance between encouraging children through expressions of love and of discipline. As the quotes show parents were wary of the consequences of over indulging their children.

> "When you pet a child too much and agree with any of their wishes, or if a child is saying something bad to a big person and instead of punishing them you pet them, they get bad *tarbia*. If you let them go their own way, they develop bad *tarbia*."
>
> Mothers' group discussion

> "I took my grandson to the *mullah* because my son, his father, was in Iran and because his father was not with us, we all spoiled him a lot. Whatever he said, we did and whatever he wanted, we did. Finally, he became bad and ill natured and used to fight with other boys. Then I took him to the *mullah* and the *mullah* gave him an amulet; and finally I got fed up and sent him to his father in Iran."
>
> Grandmothers' group discussion

> "When you love children it should be in your heart and not too obvious, because if you accept all their demands, they will get spoiled."
>
> Grandfathers' group discussion

Play

Play was seen as an important developmental activity by and for the children of Kabul, and here too children had different views from adults. Children enjoyed play because it was a chance to be with their friends and to be happy, thus improving their social and emotional well being. In contrast, adults thought of play as a developmental activity through which children could develop skills. They believe that what children played at and with could determine their future: looking after dolls would teach girls how to be good mothers; playing with cars would enable boys to have good technical skills as an adult.

Additionally, parents and children had negative things to say about play. Children said they had many accidents while playing. Parents said they had misgivings about children playing outside and facing risks to their *tarbia* by mixing with unknown children. Parents and children alike worried because children often got dirty while playing.

Conclusion

Generally, relief and development projects for war-affected children — Afghan and other — focus on their physical survival: keeping them alive with food and water, shelter and health care. This focus is undeniably important. However, this research shows that the children of Kabul, and their families, desire a state of well being and development that includes positive relationships, behavior, feelings and personal characteristics. Group discussion participants said that children, ideally, should have good *tarbia*, including agreeable manners, religious knowledge and faith, courage, cleanliness and a strong sense of responsibility and obligation, especially to the family. Group members said that children should be fresh and hopeful for the future — their own as well as that of the world around them. Additionally, participants stated their hopes that the children of Kabul avoid negative feelings such as jealousy, despair, fear and anxiety.

In sum, children and parents in Kabul have well being goals that are holistic and contextual. Well being goals for the children of Kabul do not just consist of physical or mental well being. Instead, adult and child participants in the research agree that when children achieve the positive and avoid the negative their physical and mental health is more assured. Well being goals can only be fully achieved when a child's context is positive, and when the child is supported by caring and protective relationships within the family and community.

Chapter Three: Challenges and Difficulties for the Children of Kabul

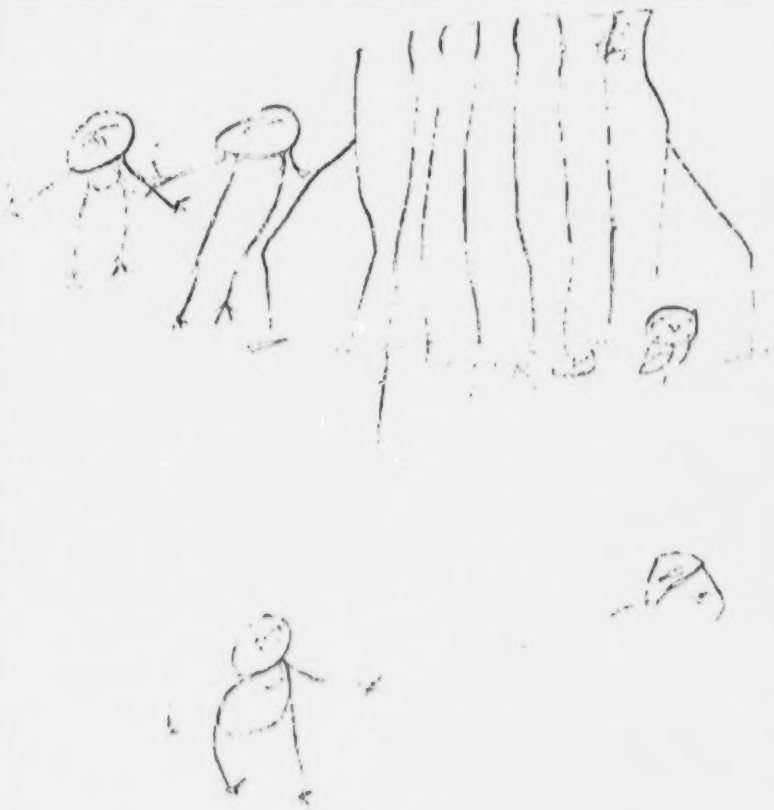
People in Kabul know all too well that children's well being is never guaranteed. Children face many challenges that threaten their well being, put obstacles in the way of their developmental goals and place them at risk of bad *tarbia*, negative feelings and unsatisfactory relations. For most in Kabul, these challenges are not small isolated incidents of difficulty; instead they are or have been situations of acute suffering with extremely negative consequences for their children.

◆◆◆◆◆

This chapter considers what participants in the research saw as their main challenges in either being or bringing up children, and the main threats to achieving children's well being. It explores how children experience challenges relative to their relationships, feelings and overall development.

Children's *Sad Day* Stories

Children's stories of days when they were unhappy illustrate some of the main difficulties and suffering they face in their lives. The most commonly drawn theme in the *Sad Day* exercise was the fall 2001 Coalition bombardment of Kabul, when children experienced firsthand the frightening events of massive bombing. This particular event was fresh in children's minds at the



"This is a picture of a day when I was very sad. I was supposed to go to weave carpets, but I didn't want to. Instead I went to play with my kite on the street. But my carpet weaving instructor came and found me playing with my kite, and when he saw me, he really hit me and took me back to weave the carpet."

Boy, age 8

time of this research. But the children of Kabul have also experienced other events leading to war and displacement and contributing to repression and poverty. Children clearly understand these events as having a negative impact on their lives and development.

It is not war or poverty alone that causes worry for children in Kabul; many drew pictures of a traffic accident or losing a family member from sickness. Family arguments and family violence, especially when a member of the family hits a child, were also mentioned as causing sadness. Just as the state of children's relationships are very important for their well being, so the loss of relationships (through death or being left alone) or bad relationships (such as violent, abusive or competitive ones) are challenges to children's well being. Children's responsibilities in the home, such as fetching water or looking after chickens, while a source of pride and a demonstration of ability, can also be difficult and demanding, and put pressure on children's feelings and well being. Likewise when children do not have physical well being — when they are hungry, injured or sick — they worry. Thus children see

challenges to their well being in everything from historical and political circumstances to relationships to personal qualities. This chapter elaborates some of these challenges further with the views and explanations of the research participants.

Sad Day Stories
14 most commonly stated *Sad Day* stories

1. experienced the Coalition bombardment
2. death of relative from sickness
3. hit by a member of the family (for playing/not going to school/not working well/teasing others/breaking something in the home)
4. friend/relative killed/injured in car crash
5. threatened by the Taliban
6. being displaced (war/earthquake)
7. trouble fetching water (no water/difficult to carry water)
8. death of chicken owned by the child
9. death of relative from war
10. witnessed people arguing and fighting (interpersonal)
11. injured while playing
12. being sick
13. sibling/friend favored over themselves
14. no food in the house

The Impact of Historical and Political Events

The children of Kabul, like children everywhere, are affected by historical and political events, including governmental realities. The tumultuous history of Kabul in the last decades means that one generation of children has grown up, and another is now being raised, in times of extraordinary conflict and instability. This section of the **Children of Kabul** explores both children's and adults' understanding of the impact of enduring conflict as well as political, governmental and economic uncertainty on children.

The experience of war

"I didn't grow up in a good time because, since I was born, there has been fighting, and I have heard so many explosions. I have not been comfortable because of poverty and because of displacement."

Youth boys' group discussion

Parents and children in the **Children of Kabul** discussion groups expressed that war has an impact on children's lives in the following ways: destruction of the physical surroundings in which children play, work and grow up; increased economic hardship and the difficulties of protecting and caring for children with reduced circumstances and resources; exposure to death and injury; increasing children's fear and affecting their courage; reducing their opportunities for education; influencing children's patterns of play; disrupting the proper mourning rituals with negative effects on children.

"The basis of all our children's problems is war; otherwise they could have a natural and ordinary death as well."

Women's group discussion

The children in the discussion groups were particularly preoccupied with the closeness of the physical dangers of war — the actual or possible death or maiming of parents, siblings, and friends in battle or by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs). All participants were very strong in their opinions that becoming disabled was one of the greatest threats to children's

"In the war we lost a lot and this has made all of us have pressure."

Youth girls' group discussion

"War has made children timid and now they suffer a lack of courage and as we know courage is an important part of children's *tarbia*."

Mothers' group discussion, IDP camp

"The lack of education during the war badly affected our children's *tarbia* because they were on the streets all the time."

Grandfathers' group discussion

"When there was no school, our children were on the streets and when they are on the street, the heart of a mother is full of worry."

Mothers' group discussion

"I feel really disappointed because if there had been no war I would be in the 12th class by now."

Youth boys' group discussion

"During the *mujahideen* time the parties were firing rockets at our village. In our village the children used to come out and make the noise of rockets with their mouths and say to me, 'Baba Jan, the rocket is coming! Run!' They said, 'I am Gulbadeen! Run! Run!' And after a few days a rocket actually fell and killed my five grandchildren."

Grandfathers' group discussion

"I knew a boy who was living on the front line and he couldn't move because he had no where to go. Now he believes in ghosts very strongly because of all the death he saw, and it is just how Allah mentioned it in the Koran."

Children's group discussion, IDP camp

well being. They talked about how children disabled in war were likely to develop negative feelings about their condition and envy of children who were not disabled, and about how difficult it was to comfort such children.

Children expressed fear for their own safety and lives, too. Such fear increased their worries and sadness to the point of weakness, sickness and anti-social behavior. For these reasons parents also said that war had affected the level of children's courage. Parents said that the impact of war on some children was to decrease their levels of courage and to make them worryingly timid and frightened, which was not good for their overall well being. On the other hand, parents said they were often proud of their children, who had gone through so many difficulties and had come through them even stronger and more courageous. Some parents even said that they were worried that their children had developed too much courage and were in danger of being *be tarbia* because they were too fearless.

Further, parents and children saw that war had affected children's opportunities for education. As discussed earlier, research participants were clear that education plays an important part in children's well being because it helps them learn how to respect others – teachers, especially – and develop good *tarbia*. In improving their knowledge, children were improving their chances for future employment, which made them hopeful. To lose opportunities for education meant that children were losing all this besides. In addition, group members said that the absence of schooling left children with too much free time, which made them bored and prone to play on the street, which might lead to bad *tarbia*.

Parents were particularly concerned that the experience of war had taught children about fighting. Parents and grandparents said that they noticed that boys in Kabul played a lot of war games, dividing into sections with the names of different military factions and pretending to attack each other. This was particularly worrying for parents and grandparents who believe, as noted earlier, that boys who play with cars are learning to be mechanics and girls who play with dolls are learning to be mothers. And so they also believe that children who play with guns will grow up to be soldiers and fighters.

Parents and children also regretted war's disruption of burial. Proper burial and mourning rites are universally important for people coming to terms with loss and death. Disruption to these rituals can aggravate grief because people cannot express their sadness fully. Some of the participants in the research said they had never been able to find the bodies of their loved ones or to bury the ones they did find in an appropriate manner. They, therefore, felt they could not give the dead the proper respect they deserve or allow themselves to fully forget and move on from this loss. Additionally, the lack of proper burial also engenders a fear of ghosts, because people believe that if the dead are not buried properly, they will come to haunt the homes in which they died. Children in the research were very preoccupied by a fear of ghosts in destroyed houses.

In sum, children and their parents were concerned about the impact of war on their *tarbia*. Not only did war bring increased risk of children developing bad *tarbia* (through factors such as losing out on education, playing war games or being fearful) but war also affected the opportunities parents had for

monitoring and correcting their children's *tarbia*. When frightened and worried, parents felt they could pay less attention to the training of their children.

"When my neighbor died we cried a lot and we said, 'Oh, God if we were in our home, we would bury this person in a better place,' but in Kabul there is nothing to do."

Children's group discussion, IDP camp

Living through the coalition bombardment

"Our house is near the military base. When the bombardment happened all our windows got broken and I was very worried."

Girl, age 9

"When parents are full of sorrow because of war, they don't have time to care for their children and this causes children to be tired of their parents and to go onto the streets and get bad *tarbia*."

Children's group discussion, IDP camp

Of course, children's most common *Sad Day* story concerned the fall 2001 Coalition bombardment of Kabul, when, as part of the war on terror and against Al-Qaida suspects in Afghanistan, there was nationwide bombing. For many children in Kabul, the Coalition bombardment is the most immediate or even the first experience they have had of the violence of war. Previous to this, the last time that the residents of Kabul knew significant fighting was when the Taliban took Kabul in 1996 – when many of the children in the research groups were babies or toddlers.

When they talked about their experience of the bombardment, children talked about their fear and nervousness at hearing the planes overhead, seeing the bombs drop, wondering if they, their family or their house would be destroyed, and their fear of experiencing a close-range bombing. It was a time when they did not know how long the fighting would continue or whether it would result in a better situation when it was over. The Coalition bombardment is an event that children in Kabul remember with much anxiety, and with the hope that they will never live through anything like it again.

"The main impact of war on children has been that they grew very afraid, also during the war no one could give good *tarbia* to their children."

Mothers' group discussion

Life under the Taliban

"One day I went to my lessons, and the Taliban's car stopped near us [but] we escaped before they beat us, and when we got home we were very afraid and we all got sick. Now when I go to the course and see a car I still think it might be the Taliban's car."

Girl, age 16

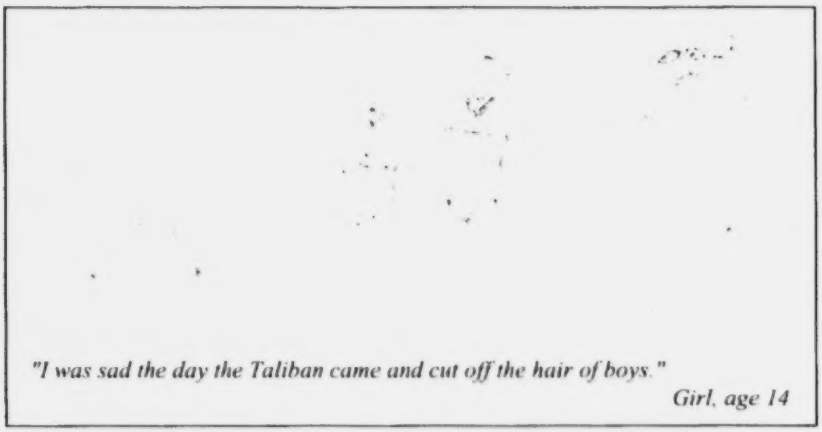
"I was so sad when I heard that an innocent person had been killed in the bombardment."

Girl, age 8

Living in the Taliban era brought particular difficulties to children. Quite commonly in the *Sad Days* exercise children cited an experience of repressive activities by the Taliban, and explained the fear they had faced when, for example, members of the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice came into schools and cut off boys' hair, or beat women who were in the market. Children explained how the Taliban edicts had spoiled their enjoyment of simple recreation like picnicking with their families and flying kites. For girls, the impact of the Taliban era was particularly acute given the restrictions on their movement and, especially, on their going to school. Many girls talked of the disappointment, frustration and negative feelings they felt every morning when they had watched their brothers go off to school while they were left behind.

"In Shomali we knew the position of the forces and we could cope, but in the bombardment, the planes were coming and bombing, everywhere. I tried to control myself but I was really shaking."

Youth girls' group discussion, IDP camp



"I was sad the day the Taliban came and cut off the hair of boys."

Girl, age 14

Displacement from Shomali

"The worst thing is being displaced and going from place to place."

Youth girls' group discussion

For many in Kabul, war and poverty have resulted in their displacement. Interestingly, there was a perception among some research participants that displacement was a coping strategy: getting away from the source of the problem and moving to a place of better opportunities or to search out resources and relatives who may be able to help them. This solution came up often as a way to cope with reminders of painful events or frightening places. Yet children in the research had also experienced displacement as a negative experience, for it entailed the loss of a beloved home and the disruption of established relationships.

Two of the groups involved in the *Children's Ideas Project* research component lived in an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Kabul. The total number of children in the two groups was 23, and they had been living in the camps for the two years since their families moved from the Shomali valley about one hour north of Kabul during the heavy fighting between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. The Taliban settled them in the remains of the former Soviet embassy compound in Kabul city. The children were involved in the research early in 2002, but by March the whole camp was empty as families moved back to Shomali after the fall of the Taliban.

Some of these children talked about their firsthand knowledge of conflict and their move from Shomali, and these themes featured in the *Sad Day* exercise. Similarly children drew pictures of being at home in their "beautiful Shomali" as *Happy Day* topics. Yet, it is surprising how infrequent reference to their displacement was — only five of the 46 happy day and sad day stories from these children make reference to their displacement. Instead, the children were preoccupied by their situation in the camp. Their *Sad Day* stories include references to the death of relatives and being unable to bury them properly because they could not get access to their homelands for burial. They talked about car accidents involving their relatives in Kabul city and their inability to get firewood and water in the camp. The children were particularly preoccupied with the physical conditions of the camp. In a mapping exercise,

where children drew their immediate surroundings and all the dangerous places, both groups drew pictures of the high-rise apartment blocks in the camp. They were concerned about these because they knew of a child who had fallen out of a window and died. The children drew pictures of the non-government organization (NGO) water tankers that brought drinking water because, in 2001, a child had been run over by one of these tankers. They drew pictures of the filth of the communal latrines, and a picture of a foreign NGO worker building the extremely unpopular communal latrines. They also drew the rabid dogs that hung around the camp, the armed soldiers who guarded the camp and the ghosts of people who had been killed when the embassy compound had been a place of conflict in the early 1990s. Children said that these ghosts lived in the basements of the apartment blocks.

Again, these children's experience is informative as it points to a theme that runs through the research: the children of Kabul are not overly preoccupied with memories of past distress; instead present trials fill their thoughts. And, although children do have bad memories of the Coalition bombardment, the repression of the Taliban and fleeing from war, the past is experienced more in the way it impacts children's current surroundings, relationships and well being. It is these ongoing effects that are of real concern for children.

Poverty

"Once my son went to the shop and asked for chaff because we didn't have any flour or bread. The shopkeeper told him, 'Don't buy the chaff because it has medicine for killing the mouse. Maybe your family will eat it and they will die; instead of bread you will get death,' and [so my son] didn't bring the chaff. That is how hard our life is — faced with a choice between death by chaff or death by starvation."

Mothers' group discussion

Widespread poverty in Kabul is long-standing; it has many causes and is experienced as a daily challenge by city residents. For children, poverty is, first and foremost, a physical experience. They know what poverty means because they know what it feels like to go to bed hungry and to go without new clothes or school supplies. Children appeared acutely aware of the consequences of poverty in terms of being ill. They knew full well that poverty meant that their parents did not have the resources for medical treatment and, therefore, their chances of recovering from sickness or injury were reduced. Thus many of the children involved in the research described how they experience their own or family members' sickness as an economic threat — an event that can place crippling financial pressures on a family, through which they all suffer. It is no wonder that children place such a high emphasis on physical protection as part of their and their families' well being. The anticipation of getting sick and not having the money for treatment was a worry for children even before such an event happened.

"Being poor can make you crazy."

Youth boys' group discussion

"It is very dangerous to play on roofs with kites because, if you fall down and injure yourself, your father will shout at you saying, 'Now where am I supposed to get the money for treating you from?'"

Boy, age 8

Children also experience poverty through increased economic burdens and responsibilities within their families, an experience which is discussed more below. Finally children also related poverty to a lack of morality. They said that poverty affects people's relationships and behavior. When children told stories and enacted role plays of the actions of bad fathers, mothers and people in general they often related this bad behavior to the effects of poverty.

"A bad family cannot treat their children when the children are sick because they have no money."

Boy, age 7

"A bad father says, 'Go anywhere and anyhow and get money. What good is school? Just get money."

Boys' group discussion

Parents, on the other hand, said they experienced poverty as a lack of capacity to be effective people. Some mothers, for example, said that the worst thing about being poor was the inability to entertain guests and visitors. Hospitality is a fundamental part of Afghan culture, *tarbia*, and being a proper person. An inability to be hospitable because of poverty means that people are not functioning to the best of their social ability, and this threatens their relationships and personal contentment.

In one group discussion, a mother gave a telling example of what it was like to be poor. She said that when her children were upset, they came to her and asked for sweets. She knew that sweets would make her children feel better and cure their distress but she did not have the money to buy sweets. In this way she could not give the support she knew her children needed. This only served to increase her own worry and disappointment. Parents experience poverty as a lack of capacity to be the loving, caring and providing parents they would like to be. This can be especially bitter for men since their roles as effective fathers are seen in terms of how well they provide for their children. Being unable to provide for their children can induce deep depression and regret in fathers.

"There are boys who sell themselves for sex and this is caused by poverty, because who would do such a thing otherwise?"

Boy, age 14

Parents also discussed how they experienced poverty as influencing the choices they made for their children's lives. Parents stated that they knew what was best for their children, but often had no choice but to forgo their good principles because of poverty. For example, parents said they knew that in order to improve their children's *tarbia* they should spend time with their children and listen to their problems. But sometimes they had no choice in the matter because they had to be out working just to put enough food on the table to meet their children's physical needs. They had to sacrifice the time that could

"These days no one has any time to advise their children. Fathers get up early in the morning when the children are asleep and they return late in the night when the children are asleep. Then they have no time for them and to see about their *tarbia*."

Grandfathers' group discussion

"When a parent has been working all day and he comes home and the child is asking a lot of questions, the parent just shouts at the child and says, 'Why are you disturbing me with your questions?'"

Children's group discussion

"Poverty has made us careless; we send our children for bread and water, and we don't care about what is happening to them on the street."

Fathers' group discussion

"I find Eid so hard because I can't buy clothes for my children and I get disappointed with myself and think, 'What kind of mother am I?'"

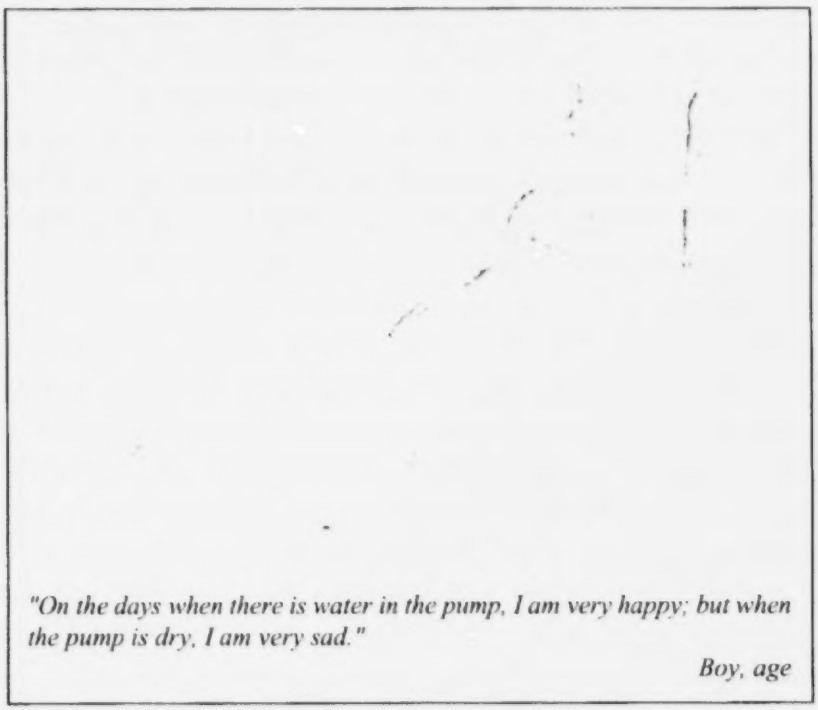
Mothers' group discussion

be spent advising and encouraging their children meeting their basic survival needs. The result of all this was that parents knew that poverty forced them to take more risks with their children's well being but felt they had little choice in the matter. The guilt parents felt over this was also compounded because knew that their children were often resentful of not receiving the time and attention they so desired from their parents.

Threats From the Physical Environment

Children in Kabul have felt the impact of war, poverty and displacement in their relationships, opportunities and in their physical environment.

War's destruction (bombed houses, falling walls and buildings with rocket and bullet holes) reminds children of all that has been lost in Kabul, and the years of violence all Afghan people have suffered. More immediately, the lack of infrastructure and the physical destruction in Kabul makes children's daily tasks and journeys dangerous and complicated. They are less well able to fulfill their responsibilities because the physical environment hinders them.



"On the days when there is water in the pump, I am very happy; but when the pump is dry, I am very sad."

Boy, age

For example, the shortage of water increases the time and travel children have to put into fetching water. Children's seventh most commonly stated *Sad Day* story was one concerning the difficulties of fetching water, which is hard for children in Kabul because they have to walk a long way to get it and because they have to cross dangerous and damaged places or busy roads to reach water sources and then, often, the water sources are not working. When children are responsible for helping sustain their families by getting water, facing problems in fetching it can be of huge concern for them and make them feel they are failing their families.

"I hate seeing a dried and useless well; it makes me so sad."

Girl, age 8

"I don't have the responsibilities of a mother and father in providing food for the family, but my responsibility is collecting water and we have no pump, so we have to go and collect it and this is my main problem in life."

Youth girls' discussion group

"Nowadays we see so many children on the street, and this causes bad *tarbia* because children learn many bad things and words on the street, and these children aren't busy in a good way like being at school."

Youth girls' discussion

Other jobs, like fetching firewood and working on the streets as vendors, pose similar risks for children and are made more tiring and anxiety prone as well because destroyed streets and houses, mined areas and failing services present many pitfalls. Displaced children are often extremely affected by the inadequacies and dangers of their physical environment; the children from the IDP camp in Kabul were very preoccupied by the difficulties of their daily household tasks in the cramped conditions of the camp.

Given the important place of work and responsibilities in children's well being, the difficult physical environment only makes this sense of well being harder to obtain. The environment in Kabul also places children at risk of accident and injury. In the research activities, children cited busy streets and traffic as the primary source of injury in Kabul. Other identified sites of physical threat were these: destroyed houses, mined areas, areas where rabid dogs congregate, military posts that are often full of rusting military hardware, and the airport. (Children felt that the noise of planes put them in physical danger, and also reminded them of bombardments.) Other physical threats were the mountains, where children go to collect firewood and which are full of rocks, thorny shrubs, and high walls, which children fall from; water points and wells, which children can fall into, and electricity lines. Children also talked about playgrounds as having physical dangers, because they knew a number of children who had fallen off swings and had accidents on climbing frames. All these places are a source of concern for children, who are fearful and nervous of passing them.

Physical Dangers for Children

Results of children's mapping activity:
Most frequently drawn places of danger, in order of frequency

1. traffic on the streets
2. destroyed houses (ghosts)
3. mined areas
4. places where mad dogs are
5. military posts
6. airport (noise of planes)
7. mountains where children collect firewood
8. high roves/walls
9. electricity lines
10. places where mad people are
11. open wells
12. water courses and rivers
13. swings
14. hospitals
15. places where drug addicts are
16. water pumps
17. water tankers
18. toilets
19. old battle grounds
20. stagnant water
21. places where there are strict people
22. places where there are thieves
23. the zoo
24. places where the trees have diseases
25. places where foreigners are
26. gas shops
27. TV/video shops
28. Taliban's house
29. ovens
30. places where mosquitoes are
31. places where snakes are
32. places damaged by the earthquake
33. kite shops
34. the Palace
35. rubbish heaps
36. places where people gamble
37. places where there are many camel

As stated earlier, there was a strong understanding from research participants that many of the difficulties and challenges children face — the things that threaten their well being — come from the community outside the home. Parents and children were not just concerned about the physical threats children encounter outside the home (such as those discussed above); they were also preoccupied with the moral threats of the wider world. Parents said that at least within the walls of the home they could keep some control on their children's behavior and *tarbia*, but as soon as children went outside they could not guarantee who they met with, what they did or what kinds of manners they learned. Some parents in the research told how one of the worst moments of their day was coming back after work to find their children playing out on the street or hanging around with undesirable people in the neighborhood because there was no one to watch over them at home. Again, this comment was told with regret that due to poverty parents had to be out working rather than caring for their children.

"We worry because our children play on the street, and they may be crushed by a car or get very dirty."

Mothers' group discussion

"When the neighbors fight or their children beat our children, the children get grief about not having their own house."

Mothers' group discussion, IDP camp

Again concern about the influence of people beyond the home was particularly acute in displaced families. The most important negative impact of displacement identified was living next to unknown neighbors. This increased the risk of arguing with neighbors, and meant that there was no guarantee of who children were going to associate with. Parents felt that was especially dangerous for their children to be out on the street in the context of unknown neighbors for fear of the influence these people might have on their children's behavior and learning.

"Being in a rented house has caused me so many problems [with my children's *tarbia*]. For example yesterday I had a big argument with my neighbors because their daughter was sitting at the window and looking at my son and saying my son was looking at her and she was laughing. I got angry when I heard this and said, 'My son doesn't look at girls, he is just interested because you have young children in your home and we don't.' Really that girl has very weak *tarbia* and she is affecting my family."

Mothers' group discuss on, IDP camp

One of the greatest fears all children and parents had about young people being outside the home was the threat of disappearance or kidnapping. There was a firmly held belief that children had been the victims of kidnapping for sale or organ extraction/sale. Adolescent girls also talked about a fear of the insecurity around them, with many soldiers holding guns out on the streets and a fear of stepping outside and showing their face with such unknown men around. Parents also feared the possibility of sexual abuse of children.[6] These particular fears must be understood in the light of the years of conflict in Kabul, where large numbers of missing persons have served to confirm children's and adults' fears of being abducted and disappearing.

"Every day some girls from the poor families here go to collect metal. One girl was very fat and beautiful, and one day a Talib tried to catch her to force her to have sex, but she shouted a lot and people came to rescue her. Then some men went and beat the *Talib*, and took the girl back to her father. But we suffered a lot after that because the *Talib* wanted revenge on us. When we asked the girl why she was doing such a thing and going alone she cried and said, 'My father is so old and I don't have any other supporter.'"

Mothers' group discussion, IDP camp

Children themselves recognized that their parents worried about them going outside the house. They said that they knew their parents would be worried when they were working on the streets or even just walking to school or playing outside the home. This increased their sense of responsibility, but children also said that their parents' worries and concerns annoyed them because this sometimes restricted them from acting on their own desires.

School and teachers

"Teachers can be so cruel. For example, there was a teacher in our class and she knew that one girl's mother was a widow and she made the girl stand up and the teacher said, 'Look how fat she has become on her widow's cards!'"

Girl, age 15

[6] While their fear was greatest in this regard for girls, other research indicates that in Afghanistan sexual abuse is much more likely to happen to boys.

Much as children and parents recognized the importance of school in children's well being, children also talked about school as a place of risk. The challenges posed by school are twofold and contradictory: first, the impact of exclusion from school and second, problems that occur within school.

Children talked about being specially upset if they were excluded from school as some had been for lack of proper documentation, lack of money to buy the necessary uniform and materials or because they were girls who had reached an age at which their families did not consider it appropriate that they attend.

On the other hand, children talked about problems they faced inside their schools such as stress at times of exams, stress that they should perform well and make their parents proud of them, but worry when they could not understand their lessons and classes. Children also described how cruel teachers made their lives difficult because they used physical punishment as a form of discipline, which causes children worry, at least, and physical injury, at worst. Teachers could also be cruel by taunting and a lack of sympathy, making a teacher very different from the kind and sympathetic person which children appreciated.

Relations in the Family and Home

Much of the emphasis of participants' views were on the challenges and dangers posed to children's well being from beyond the four walls of the home, outside the family. Yet, the home is not always a secure and safe place, nor are family relationships always proper and supportive to children. Inside as well as outside the home and family, there are many difficulties for children to negotiate.

Family loss and separation

"Losing a family member is like this – it is like you are on a river in a ship and then the driver of the ship dies and you are just left in the big river unable to drive the ship."

Youth girls' group discussion

One of the strongest themes that emerged in discussions about difficulties faced by children was the impact of the loss of and separation from family members. The decades of war in Afghanistan have obviously increased the number of children who have experienced the loss of a family member because so many people have been killed or disappeared in fighting and conflict. Some of the children participating in the research talked about experiencing the death of a loved one in war and violence. One of the surprising findings of the research was that when children talked about the death of a relative, the death was more likely to be caused by sickness, old age or a traffic accident than by war. One of the very startling points of the research was just how many children in Kabul knew someone who had been killed or injured in a car accident.

This finding was a good reminder that although war has caused children to lose their relatives, they face many other physical dangers as well. The problem of traffic accidents seems to be particularly acute in Kabul where, with reconstruction and recovery, the numbers of vehicles on the streets are increasing daily. These pose a threat to children, who are unfamiliar with cars after the quiet streets of the Taliban era. The problem is particularly great for girls, who are now increasingly leaving the home to go to school and are unused to walking on busy streets. For children in Kabul, the changes peace has brought can be as threatening as those of war.

"The day that my father was crushed by a car, I was very sad. His body was thrown from one side of the road to the other."

Boy, age 6

Whatever the cause, the effect of losing a family member is very powerful on children for many reasons. First, there is the impact of grief. Many children involved in the research had bitter memories of crying at funerals, and coming to terms with the loss of a loved one. Like anyone who loses someone close

to them to death, children in Kabul talked about how one of the hardest things, which caused them the most grief, was knowing that they would never see that person again.

Second, the impact of family death is also felt as a loss of the protection, *tarbia*, and love. Children and parents in Kabul stressed that this was especially the case for a child who lost a father, because they lost their greatest protector. The consequences for a family of the loss of their provider are very great indeed, which may also result in added economic responsibilities for the children of a household as they take up jobs to earn money to fill the economic gap left by the loss of a provider. In this regard, an adolescent boy in the family often feels the impact of the loss of a father most heavily.

"Having no guardian or protector in the house makes children have bad *tarbia*. If there is no protector, there will be no *tarbia*."

Women's group discussion

Of course it is not just the death of a father or mother that affects a family. Children involved in the research also deeply mourned the death of a grandparent. They feel such a loss most deeply because, while growing up, they spend a lot of time with their grandparents, who play an important part in their care, *tarbia* and teaching. Grandparents are sometimes inside the home more often than parents, who may be out trying to earn money. In such cases, children can really miss grandparents when they die.

"The families who don't have any man to help them, to care for them, to support them and to connect them, they are in the most difficult situation."

Youth girls' discussion group

The loss of a sibling or friend also affects children's well being, especially because it is hard for children to understand the loss of someone who is their peer, and with whom they do things and play. Children in Kabul said they found it hard to understand why a brother, sister or friend that they spent time with had died and they had been left alive.

"Once, in Shomali, my friend was killed by a landmine, and I cried a lot because he was young like me."

Children's group discussion, IDP camp

In addition, there are children in Kabul who have experienced multiple losses: deaths from sickness in addition to deaths from war and accidents. The consequences for these children are not only too-frequent exposure to grief but also a severe weakening of their network for protection and care. Their situation is of particular cause for concern.

"My father died, and then I lived with my uncle and he died also, and then I lived with another uncle but he also died, and then I lost all my protectors."

Youth boys' group discussion

Another consequence of losing a family member for children is the new family relationships that often follow. This is most obvious in the case of the loss of a father because many widowed mothers remarry, and children have to come to terms with a new father figure and new family dynamics. While this is not always a problematic event, some children talked about the added family tensions and disappointments they feel in getting used to new fathers and in seeing their mothers struggle in the new family situation.

"My husband was killed and I went back to my father's house, but my brother's wives fought with me and told me to leave the house or marry someone else. I went back to my father-in-law's house, and he married me to his nephew. They were so poor and we didn't even have a mattress. Now I have new children from this husband, and I have sent my other children to their aunt. Altogether, I have a lot of grief and feel that I am only just alive."

Women's group discussion

"My father died and my mother remarried and now I have a half brother and sister, but my new father favors them and promises them that his land will be theirs when they are older, even though we are the ones earning the money in the home."

Girl, age 16

"My neighbor has had a terrible amount of suffering. Her only son was killed, and after two years her husband remarried in order to produce an heir. This new wife had a son and a daughter, but the man was murdered and the two wives were left. The first wife tried to keep the second, and didn't let her know all her secret sorrow. Then the second wife remarried and took the two children, which the first wife really loved. [The second wife] married the son of her brother-in-law, so all the inheritance of the family went to her children and the first wife was left with nothing."

Women's group discussion

Separation from living family members is another threat to children's well being in Kabul. Family separation occurs in many ways. For example, some of the children involved in were separated from their fathers because their fathers had gone to look for work in other towns or countries. Similarly, children had been separated from their parents because [the children] had been sent abroad to learn how to make carpets. Others had divided their families when they were displaced. The main negative feeling children talked about when separated from family was loneliness. Additionally, parents and grandparents said that being separated as a family was a worry because they would not be able to fully control the *tarbia* of the children with whom they are not in contact. Some also alluded to the danger of being separated as a family with no guarantee of what would happen to the family and no possibility to offer protection or know their children's problems or needs.

Displacement increases family separation; different family members often go separate ways. Thus, displacement breaks up social relationships and weakens the links of *wasta* among family members, which are a crucial part of children's care and protection. Despite being used to displacement and seeing it as an effective coping strategy, children also mentioned that displacement involves a separation from home — the place where they have grown up and become attached to. Displacement thus involves negative feelings of homesickness, loneliness and sorrow about what has been left behind. Family homes are places of birth, marriage and death, and of family identity and happy memories. They are also places of physical resources with rights to land and water. Being forced away from family homes is indeed an experience of loss and grief.

"Even if you live for a hundred years in a place which is not your place, you will want to leave and go back to your home. Even if you put a bird in a cage and feed it well, it will still desire freedom."

Girl, age 14

"It is not good for a girl to live with anyone other than her parents. There is a saying, 'A mother and father are irreplaceable fruit.'"

Girl, age 15

"Poverty and war has caused families to live separately. For example, a father may have to stay in Pakistan to get money and his children may be in Afghanistan. Then the father has no ideas about what his sons are doing, whether they are alive or what they are doing — good or bad."

Grandfathers' group discussion

"When the *mujahideen* captured Afghanistan, Rabbani announced that everyone should come to Afghanistan because there was no more war. So my sons and I came back, but when the Taliban came into power they were arresting boys so I sent my two sons back to Pakistan again. I said to my wife, "Let us go to Pakistan." But my wife wanted to stay with her parents, so she stayed and I went. Then when I was in Pakistan I got the news that my wife had died, but I didn't know how or why, and it was such a sorrow for me that I had not been with her."

Grandfathers' group discussion

In research participants' opinions, the most serious cases of family separation were for those families who had a family member missing, with no information about the person's whereabouts or condition: well or ill, unharmed or injured, alive or dead. Often people did not know why their relative was missing. Sometimes the person may have moved to find an economic opportunity and never came back; other times people assumed that the person was caught up in fighting and killed, but they did not know for certain since a body has never been found. In Kabul, there seems to be a high proportion of families with a missing relative, especially among the displaced. Families and children in this position said they experienced a lot of worry and anxiety, sometimes being hopeful that the relative was alive and sometimes being depressed and sure they would never see the person again. Some adults who had a missing relative, especially women missing husbands, said they would actually prefer to know that the person was dead so they and their children could get used to the situation.

"We have moved so many times that maybe we have relatives that we are not aware of so how can we help each other?"

Mothers' group discussion

"My son is in jail and we don't know where he is. Every time I see his fiancée my heart breaks because she is looking hopeful and to the future. I just pray to God that it will all be OK."

Women's group discussion, IDP camp

Having a person missing from the family can have social consequences. For example, a woman who is missing a husband will not call herself a widow, and so she cannot claim any compensation for being a widow. But the family still suffers not having the economic support of a husband.

Having a person missing also increases fear. There were some families in the research, for example, who had a child go missing and were so frightened that they might lose another child that they moved away from the area or did not allow their other children to leave the home.

Family tensions

"War in the country and war in the home makes us worried and sad."

Boys' group discussion

Tensions and arguments within the family are a threat to children's well being. In the group discussions, a number of causes of family tensions were identified. Participants said that poverty was a major cause of family tensions. When parents face worries in feeding, clothing and providing for their children, this reality takes its toll on the nature of relationships within the family, provokes arguments and puts extra pressure on children, too.

"The days when my mother and father don't fight, I am very happy."

Girl, age 7

In discussing other causes of family tensions, participants talked about the consequences of a member of the family using drugs (heroin or hashish, for example) or alcohol. Children said that family members who used drugs were aggressive and did not show them love and affection or take the time to give them advice and encouragement. They also said that someone using drugs in the home increased the number of arguments in the family, because the person became bad tempered, and also because other family members resented the behavior. The use of drugs also created economic difficulty for a family. In one case, for example, two brothers were heavy heroin users who did not give their wives any money for the family. So the wives went out on the streets to beg for money and food, and their children joined them. Both wives said they would prefer to be widows than have to undergo such suffering, including the constant arguments they had with their husbands.

Families also argue over gender-appropriate behavior. Children mentioned many family arguments involving accusations that girls in the house had boyfriends. They told stories of fathers accusing daughters of having boyfriends, of beating the girls to get the supposed truth out of them and, thus, creating

"My older sister is a real problem for us. Every day she sits at the window waving to boys and looking at them. When my father catches her with her boyfriends, he beats her and there is no peace in the home."

Children's group discussion, IDP camp

"In this place there are some very stupid girls who go around giving boys cards. The cards say things like, 'I love you.' Really these girls make a lot of problems for their families, and for all the boys in this place, because the boys get accused of disturbing the girls."

Boy, age 10

"My husband was a military person and he got injured. He became so nervous and angry, and sometimes gets nervous shock. When he comes home, he beats my son or me. But whenever he has good food, like almonds, he is OK. If I delay the food or the tea, he gets nervous shock and his face becomes black and blue. If I don't console myself, I will get so sick."

Women's group discussion, IDP camp

"The day I was very sad, this is what happened to me. My mother had promised that she would take me to the bazaar, but when it was time to go my younger sister cried and cried a lot and said that it wasn't fair that I should go and she should not go. So, because my sister was crying a lot and making a huge noise, my mother decided to take her to the bazaar and leave me behind. Then I became so disappointed, and I was really very sad."

Girls' group discussion

tensions. Younger children called these older sisters *be tarbia* sisters and were very condemning of their behavior. Adolescent girls, in contrast, said that one of their main problems were false accusations made by fathers and brothers that they were speaking to boys or dressing or behaving in a way inappropriate for a girl.

It is noteworthy that the object of family arguments over gender appropriate behavior was always a girl. Girls said how they often controlled and limited their behavior in order to prevent such arguments. Once again this is an example of how a girl's behavior is influenced by the reactions of the people around them. This perpetuates the conservatism of girls, and prevents them from going beyond the boundaries of what is considered acceptable for them.

There were some rare cases in the research where the serious mental illness or depression of a father in the home put an especially great strain on family relationships. Some mothers, for example, said that ever since their husbands had been soldiers and had received injuries, their character had never been the same again and they were given to bouts of anger and violence. In other cases, a father's depression and violence was related to financial debt. In both situations, mental stress was understood as causing more arguments in the home.

Finally, family tensions are caused by enmities between relatives. At one end of the spectrum, the situations involved serious clashes between members of an extended family in which relatives refused to speak to or visit each other. When children spoke about such quarrels within their families they referred to how it affected their relationships with the extended family, meaning that they could not visit or be friends with cousins. At the other end of the spectrum, and obviously very important to children, were cases of sibling rivalry. Such examples came up quite often in conversations with the children when they talked about how upset, angry or jealous it made them when a sibling was favored, or when they fought with brothers and sisters.

Children said that the consequences of family tensions on their well being were violence in the home (typically violence of husbands against wives or parents against children) and threats to children's *tarbia*. Children involved in the research were very clear about the negative impact on their well being of the use of physical punishment against them in the home. In the *Sad Day* activity, for example, the third most frequently stated *Sad Day* story was something to do with a time when the child was beaten in the home — often because they were being punished for breaking something or for engaging in *be tarbia* behavior, such as teasing other children or playing out on the street when they had been told not to. Children were also clear about the negative impact of witnessing the violence of their fathers against their mothers. Children talked about empathizing with and worrying about their mothers. In children's opinions, the result of all family tensions, and the violence that came from them, was to increase their levels of worry, fear, anxiety and unhappiness, which was often expressed in their own sickness and antisocial behavior.

Second, children and parents said that tensions and violence in the home affected children's *tarbia*, because children who grow up in a family of

violence are likely to learn violence themselves, and because *tarbia* depends on family unity and children getting consistent training from both mother and father. When parents are not united in their parenting, it was said that children become confused and do not know whose example to follow, which affects their ability to learn good *tarbia*.

"I really hate my sister. Whenever I am in these groups she is always spying on me, then she will go and tell my father that, 'Rita has been sitting in a group with boys,' and this will bring trouble for me. Also she never helps me with my work. Really, I hate her a lot."

Girl, age 13, IDP camp

Work and economic responsibilities

"When we want to put our push carts somewhere to sell things, the traffic police annoy us and don't allow us to stay there. When we ask them what we should do they say, 'Sit inside your home.' But working in the home is also difficult because we wake up at dawn and we get diseases from making carpets and one of my friends even injured his eye with the carpet tool."

Boys' group discussion

"A neighbor of mine had a bad husband who beat her a lot and she got crazy from the pain, and that affected her children."

Grandmothers' group discussion

As discussed, children in Kabul are expected to do housework and, as they get older, to contribute increasingly to the economy of the household. These are seen as important developmental activities for children, and children themselves feel proud of what they do and the obligations they have towards their families. Children especially value their work when it is teaching them a skill that is important for their future. However, children talked about their responsibilities as being difficult and having negative aspects, although they generally said that they would prefer to be busy with housework and helping their families rather than not.

"If a family has economic problems, they will fight with each other all the time, and this will affect children's *tarbia*."

Mothers' group discussion

Sometimes children find their responsibilities burdensome because of the difficult physical conditions around them, and sometimes the responsibilities children have in the home clash with what they are practically able to do. Again, poverty compounds the situation. The following quote from a young girl shows a child charged with responsibilities in the home and for whom poverty and limited resources made her daily tasks unachievable and worrisome:

"Last night I fought with my husband and, after a time, my son copied what his father was doing and said, 'The only way I will get better is if you bring me some almonds.' So a child learns both right and wrong from his parents."

Women's group discussion, IDP camp

"When I get up in the morning and there is nothing to eat I get upset, then I go into the yard and it is very dusty and needs sweeping, but I can't sweep it because if I do I will get dirty and need soap, which we don't have money for."

Children's discussion group

The difference between children enjoying their household obligations and finding them a burden is often found when, through poverty or family loss, children must assume major roles and responsibilities in providing for their families. Given widespread poverty in Kabul, families are increasingly reliant on their children's participation in the cash economy. Children earn money for their families by working in shops and workshops, by collecting scrap materials and even through begging.[7] Working on the street appears to cause children and their parents special anxiety about the impact on children's well being. Having children on the street exposes them to all the physical and moral dangers that parents are concerned about for the effect on children's *tarbia*.

"We tried to send our small brother to the orphanage, but they wouldn't accept him so instead we all make carpets and it is very hard."

Boy, age 11

"I don't like cooking because of all the smoke."

Girl, age 9

[7] For fuller information on children working on the streets in Kabul see, "Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul" (July 2002): Terre Des Homme, Aschiana Street Children's Project, Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan.

"Weaving carpets is a real problem because it makes our spine and bones ache. We sit all day and waste our time not able to go to lessons or to play."

Youth boys' group discussion

"When you weave carpets there is a lot of dust and this makes us sick."

Youth boys' group discussion

Children also see working on the streets as creating a tension between the time they must give to help their families earn money and the time they would like to give to going to school and playing and socializing for their own personal development. They often cannot go to school because their parents need them to earn money, and this makes children regret their situation. One of the major but less visible ways in which children help earn money for their families in Kabul is through carpet weaving. Children said they disliked carpet weaving because it caused them to develop coughs as well as back and muscle aches, but also because it took time away from their being able to go to school and study, or to play and socialize. Many children who weave carpets in Kabul learned their skills in Pakistan. Being sent to Pakistan to learn carpet weaving and being separated from their immediate families for this time, becoming lonely and homesick there, appears to be quite a common experience of boys in Kabul.

Peer Relations

Comparing self to others

A theme that came very strongly from the discussions with children was that, whatever their problems, they were made much worse and exaggerated if they then compared themselves to other children and found themselves alone in their situation or worse off than those around them. Children identified this as a major cause of the sickness of resentment (*ochdar*).

Children said that they feel especially bad about their problems if their peers tease them. This verbal bullying appears to occur in schools especially and to cause the children much pain and loneliness. At other times, children felt sorry for themselves because comparison with a friend or peer in a happier situation made them reflect upon their own difficulties. So, for example, a child was reminded of the loss of a father when she or he saw a friend or peer benefiting from a father's love. Parents also caused themselves grief when they knew that their children were worse off than others, and when they saw their children become jealous of the resources of others.

"I used to go to school, but then my father sent me out to collect dung and when I went back to school, everyone was laughing at me for collecting dung, and I didn't go anymore. Now I look at my old classmates and they have progressed, and I am still collecting dung."

Boys' group discussion

"If children tease you that you don't have a father and [they] do, then it is very painful and you can't forget."

Boys' group discussion

"If a child has a beautiful toy and another doesn't, this child will be very disappointed."

Mothers' group discussion

"If your economic situation is bad and that of your neighbors is good, you will be worried about the fact that they have a carpet and food and you don't. So, of course, your original worry will increase."

Girl, age 16

"I have no father, and when I see my friend with her father and see him hugging her, I get a lot of sorrow and jealousy."

Youth girls' group discussion

"Argon's son is lame and sometimes he comes to our house and talks with my father and says to him, 'All the children call me 'the lame boy' and I feel so sad.' Then I also become sad."

Children's group discussion

"... because the lamp was warm the barrel exploded and burned my cousin's legs and hands and my cousin was in hospital for four months and when I heard this I was very worried and felt a lot of pity for him."

Boy, age 8

Children said they were also caused sadness when they took on the suffering of others by seeing their suffering and empathizing with them. One of the most common bad sights children mentioned in one of the research activities was the suffering of other people. Here, children suffered negative feelings, not because they looked around and saw others in a better condition than themselves, but because they looked around and saw others worse off. This was specially the case when children saw their parents suffering.

Things the Children of Kabul Do Not Like To See

Most frequently stated bad sights

1. people fighting (interpersonal)
2. children with bad *tarbia* and manners
3. destroyed houses
4. people who are suffering
5. children who are dirty
6. things of war – guns, tanks
7. people fighting (war)
8. scary films
9. dogs at night
10. people who spit in the street
11. dead bodies
12. cats
13. dirt
14. animals that have been crushed by cars
15. frogs
16. crazy people
17. flies
18. donkeys

Love affairs

"My uncle said that he was in love with someone and wanted to marry her, but her parents did not allow that marriage. My uncle was educated in university and people said that he was an excellent man, but the prevention of that marriage made him crazy. He is not violent, but when he is with people he only calls them by the name of the girl, who he loved."

Youth boys' group discussion

Children, especially adolescents, can be affected in their relations with others through falling in love. Although this topic was not often mentioned or with much detail when parents and groups of adolescent boys and girls were discussing the causes of extreme distress, they did sometimes mention cases of young people who had fallen in love and suffered because of it. There were examples of young people who had suffered because they had fallen in love with someone and their affection had not been returned or their proposal of marriage had been turned down. There were also stories of those for whom waiting for marriage had caused worry and anxiety. Finally, there were examples of engaged couples that had been separated because of displacement or migration, and of the sadness this caused to both parties.

Personal Characteristics

Gender

"One of neighbors migrated to Quetta and married her 13 year old daughter to someone, but the poor girl had a very uncomfortable life because she was just a child and didn't know anything about marriage. She had two children, but her husband was beating her a lot and finally divorced her. Now she is a little mad and always cries about those children she lost and whom she remembers a lot."

Girl, age 18

During the research there were some concerns that adolescent girls talked about more commonly than young children and boys. These concerns involved situations that adolescent girls felt they were more exposed to because of their gender. Although girls recognized that there were elements of protection in the way their families restricted them and took special note of where they went and whom they met with, they talked about frustration over the restrictions placed on their movements and opportunities. The girls also mentioned special disappointment if they had been in school for some time but were then stopped from going because their parents felt they were getting too old to be out in public. Girls regretted the loss of opportunities for education and the hope for their futures that education gave them.

Adolescent girls were worried about their own security. For example, there was a rumor going around many of the discussion groups at the time of the research that some girls who had decided to take off their *burqas* had had acid thrown in their faces. Girls worried about threats to their security, not only because these put them in physical danger, but also because such threats affect others' perceptions of their *tarbia*, and bring shame upon their family and themselves.

"One of our relatives had a daughter of 14, and her family married her to an old man, and the girl was not happy and didn't know how to love and have relations with her husband because she was too young and, after some years, her husband married another woman and the first wife now lives as a servant, not a wife."

Girl, age 15

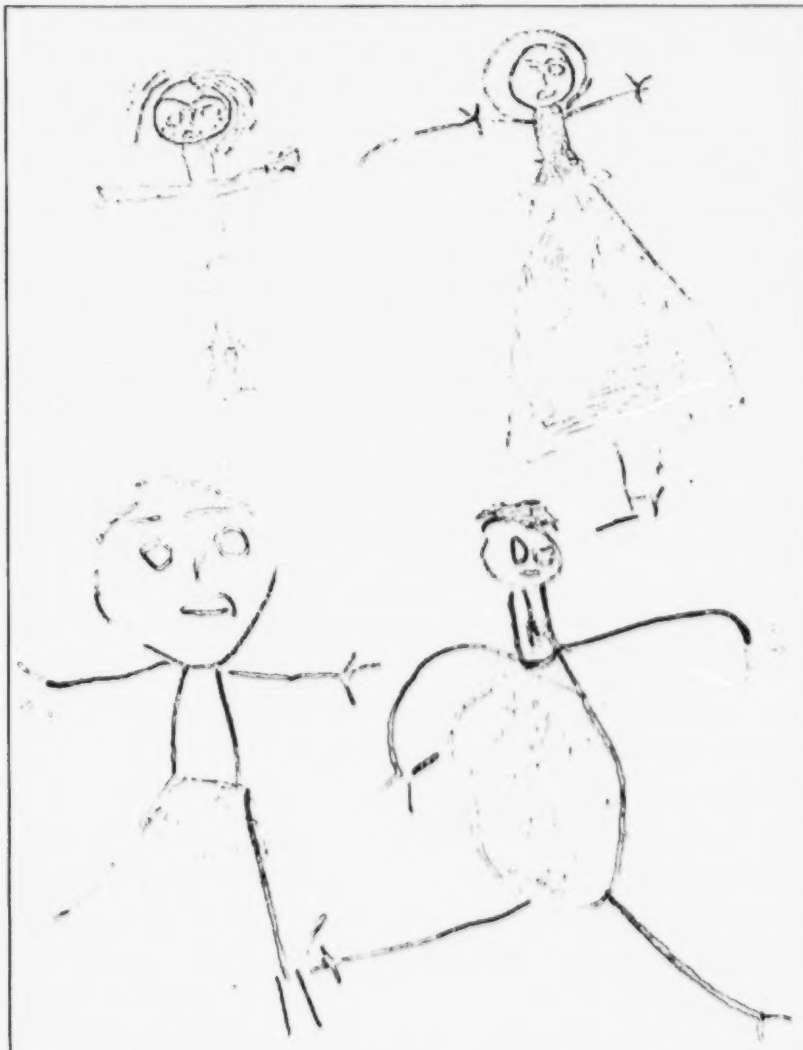
"Marriage is difficult because your responsibilities increase, and if your children get sick or injured there is only yourself to care for them."

Youth girls' group discussion

Girls also talked about the social and emotional consequences of marriage. While both adolescent boys and girls saw marriage as a crucial part of their social development, both also saw that it would entail added responsibilities and perhaps increase their worry and anxiety. For girls, however, these cares were stronger. Marriage in Afghanistan always entails some expression of sorrow by a woman, for a girl must move away from her family and must break the social networks that have supported her all her life in order to form new ones with her husband's family. Sometimes relationships with in-laws are problematic and unsupportive, and a newly wed girl is made to greatly miss her own family. In marriage, girls also take on responsibility for a husband and children, which can be a heavy burden. Women and adolescent girls involved in the research said that all these problems were made worse if the girl was too young and immature to take on such a life change, and if she had not been properly prepared by her family. The changes of marriage

would also be made harder if the family of the husband lived far away from the family of the girl and there was less chance for her to keep in contact with them, or if the husband's family was poorer than the wife's family and she was not used to dealing with poverty.

Finally, girls are affected by attitudes about gender in their society. For girls in Kabul, these attitudes generally entail lower value being placed on the opportunities for girls than for boys, or boys being given special favor in the home. At the same time, strong opinions by brothers and parents about what is appropriate behavior for girls means that girls are often criticized and teased for stepping out of line, and girls reported the worry and fear that goes along with such teasing and criticism.



"The day I was very sad was when my mother gave birth to another daughter in spite of already having four daughters. I mean we became five girls. On that day my father, my mother and us, we all got sad."

Girl, age 9

Conclusion

The opinions of children and their families in Kabul give insight into the complexity of both the challenges they face and the consequences of those problems. In working with war-affected children such as those in Kabul, there has been a tendency to look only at the consequences of children's witness of war-related violence with a view to its negative impact on children's mental health. The **Children of Kabul** research shows, however, that while witnessing war has certainly affected children and made them deeply fearful, the challenges and difficulties faced by children go beyond seeing and experiencing violence. The risks to children's well being in Kabul range from those associated with children's personal characteristics, such as health and gender, to the possible negative impact of peer relations; from relations with parents and family members and circumstances in the community to the wider historical and political situation in which children are living. Even the political situation that affects children's well being is not all about war. In fact, peace and reconstruction in Kabul have led to increased danger from traffic, for example, for children.

In Kabul people tend to draw a line between challenges from outside the home and those inside the home. The home and family are private; the four walls of the home are seen as shielding family life from public view. For this reason it is easier to get information about the challenges and difficulties, such as war and school or work, which children face outside the home. This research shows, however, that it often the circumstances of families and the nature of relationships among family members that are the most critical to children's well being and present the biggest challenges to children as they are growing up. The family is recognized as a place of potential care and protection, but bad family relationships, circumstances, loss of family members, and poverty can turn the family into a harsh and unloving environment for children.

Likewise, schools and teachers, which are vital to children's well being and should be supportive for children's social development, can be the source of much distress for children. This proves that it is not the place and person, *per se,* which is important for children, but the quality of relationships within that place or from that person. Parents, other relatives, teachers, friends, *mullahs* and neighbors who are kind, supportive, caring and who spend time in advice and encouragement for children have a positive impact; but cruel relationships marked by mockery, disinterest, criticism, discrimination and violence can make a parent, other relative, teacher, *mullah* or friend a child's worst foe.

As is now clear, the different challenges faced by children can be cumulative. In the descriptions above, sources of difficulties have been categorized as historical, environmental, community-based, family or personal. In fact, it is impossible to separate the complex and multiple difficulties faced by children and to address them one by one. A child experiencing one set of problems will most likely face a whole set of other ones as well. For example, the major impact of war on a child may be displacement and separation as well as poverty and new economic responsibilities to help provide for the family. Or, a girl who is married early faces challenges because she is young and does not know her new family members. She may also face challenges as she takes on new work responsibilities. Or, a child who has lost a mother may suffer

because she or he no longer has maternal care and protection and also because her or his friends, by comparison, do still have mothers. The testimonies of children in Kabul show how difficulties and suffering are always experienced in relation to each other; one set of difficulties can compound and aggravate others.

One way in which threats to children are linked is in time. This is clearly the case in how children understand and experience the impact of war. It is the long term results of war that affect children as much the short term experience of violence. For example, children who witnessed the death of a relative in war may be affected by the bad memories of the event and with grief in the short term, but they are also affected in the long term because they have lost someone who may have been able to give them good *tarbia*, or advice and encouragement, or protection and assistance. In the same way, children who did not experience the years of *mujahideen* fighting in Kabul are still affected by that fighting because they get sad and scared when they see bombed out buildings and they are frightened by the ghosts they believe to be living in these buildings. Further, old battle grounds pose many risks for them: mines, UXOs and dangerous areas, which they have to cross to fetch water or firewood. So, by this example, what the research clearly illustrates is that children's greatest worries are in the present: a child is much more likely to be preoccupied with the difficulties of crossing a mine field to fetch water today, than remembering an experience of fighting which happened several years ago.

There was a strong perception among research participants that the most serious kind of difficulty is suffering that goes on without end. As the quote below suggests, people felt that the longer suffering continued, the more likely it was that children would develop negative feelings, and their development and well being would be at risk. If challenges only happened for a short time, they could be more easily dealt with — and with less damaging effect.

> "There are many kinds of sorrow (*gham*). For example, when we lose one of our family and he dies, the people will say that she has *gham*. If a rocket falls on someone's house that also causes *gham*. When someone is sick that also causes *gham*. When we lose friends that also causes *gham*. My brother is mad and he is kept with chains on his hands and feet. That also causes *gham*. It is a gradual death for his family because every second is sorrowful for them. It is perpetual *gham*. If my father dies, of course it brings gham but it is not a big or perpetual *gham* because he dies once and then he is buried; but seeing my brother, how he is, that brings *gham* every second."
>
> Mothers' group discussion, IDP camp

Likewise, poverty creates causal links between different kinds of problems. Being poor and vulnerable can make any other challenge greater. So, for example, poverty may increase tensions in the home, poverty may force a child to work on the street, to drop out of school, to be married at an early age thus engendering all these associated problems as well. Poverty compounds any situation and increases the negative effect on children's feelings and social relationships.

Just as the problems faced by children in Kabul are complex so, too, are the effects of these problems. The evidence from the research is of a host of

negative effects including the impact on children's development, relationships, feelings and opportunities. Looking at the impact of problems on children's physical and mental health only reveals part of this wide range of negative consequences. Even when talking about war, children talked about the impact of physical destruction, the threat of displacement, the impact on their *tarbia* as much as the mental distress of witnessing fighting.

Children of Kabul Talk About Worry

Most common worries

1. ghosts
2. hearing bombs and explosions and worrying about war starting
3. seeing someone suffer from sickness and worrying about them getting better
4. having hard work and worrying about how to do it
5. earthquakes and worrying about being killed
6. crossing the road when there is a lot of traffic
7. dying
8. when someone else in the family has a worry
9. no food in the house
10. a lot of work because with many guests in the house
11. exams
12. insults from a father
13. hearing bad news

Children of Kabul Talk About Fear

Things that children are most commonly afraid of

1. ghosts
2. darkness
3. people with guns (including ISAF)
4. bombs and explosions
5. dangerous places
6. earthquakes
7. when mother goes out of the house
8. crazy people
9. boys who wink at and follow girls
10. being alone

Chapter Four: Coping with the Challenges

Although parents and children alike know what they ideally want for children, there are many challenges, difficulties and situations of suffering that threaten the achievement of their ideals. Nonetheless, children are not always defeated by these difficulties. Indeed, part of what parents and children feel is important for children's development and well being is to learn how to cope when circumstances are bad.

◆◆◆◆◆

This chapter looks at the strengths and resources that children, and their parents, employ to cope with challenges, minimize their negative impact and reduce suffering. It also considers the factors that make a difference in how children, and parents, can cope. Indeed, the findings of the **Children of Kabul** research show that the strengths and resources discussed here allow children in Kabul to live through difficulties with optimism and resilience.

Attitude Towards Suffering

"The people who suffer more sorrow after sorrow get used to it because there is a saying, 'New cares and sorrow drive away the old ones'."

Grandfathers' group discussion

"We have seen so many wars, so we are not afraid of war anymore. During the bombardment I heard an interview with an Afghan man who was saying to the western countries, 'These bombs are just like potatoes to us! War is nothing to us!' He was right!'"

Girl, age 17

Families involved in this research identified a range of attitudes toward suffering that helps them comprehend and come to terms with difficult situations and make the most of them. The most important of these attitudes are acceptance, faith and morality, thankfulness, courage and empathy. Children are taught and encouraged to develop these attitudes from an early age. At the heart of this attitude is an understanding that suffering, risks and dangers are a common and inevitable part of human life. Adults and children in Kabul know that it is likely that everyone will, at some time in her or his life, encounter difficulties, and that there will be no escape from suffering. This sense of inevitability about problems and troubles is seen as a source of strength, which allows people to prepare themselves for living through trouble and for sympathizing with others who go through hard times. Thus, even a condition of continuous and multiple suffering does not preclude the possibility of being able to cope and even growing stronger through it.

"When a person understands the situation, they have resilience, and understanding comes from God."

Mothers' group discussion

"We know that all fate and judgment are from God, and this helps us not to lose courage."

Boy, age 14

Religious faith is also central to how children are taught to understand and bear suffering. Children are taught prayers to say when they are scared, and children in the research confirmed that they commonly use prayer as an effective tool against fear. So, for example, children said that when they are afraid of ghosts or passing a grave or destroyed house, they say the *Kalima* and feel safe. Children are also encouraged to understand that all that happens to them is in the hands of God, beyond their control and, therefore, to be accepted. People take comfort in believing that God is in control of their fortune and misfortune, and that there is often nothing they can do to influence the situation; so they must bear with it. Also, it was clear that religious faith offers people hope that things will be better in the future.

"When I am scared, I remember the name of God."

Girl, age 7

"When I am afraid, my mother sleeps with me and takes me in her arms and says that we mustn't be afraid because Almighty God will pity us."

Boy, age 7

Tarbia and the morality that comes with religious knowledge are important for children to cope with suffering. As parents in Kabul noted, it is one thing to be exposed to bad events, but it is another to know right from wrong. Children need not follow the wrong path if they can tell the difference between good and bad, and not let their thoughts and behavior be affected by the bad. Parents said that a difficult or sad event would have less negative impact on a child if the child could understand that the *situation* [not the child her or himself] was bad. Having good *tarbia* allows children to develop this understanding, and adults said that exposure to harmful events could be the source of children learning right from wrong as long there was someone to advise and encourage them. In other words, children with good *tarbia* from their families are more likely to withstand threats to their social development and emotional happiness because they are able to differentiate right from wrong and, thus, to understand events without negative consequences for their moral and social development. In addition, parents and children stated that having good *tarbia* was an important factor in being able to avoid difficulties because children with good *tarbia* are less likely to get themselves into risky and dangerous situations because they will listen to advice and warnings by elders.

Children are also expected to be courageous and to learn how to overcome their fears, which they do by confronting their fears and being reassured by those around them when they are afraid. Quite a few children said that one of the most important strategies in helping them cope with a place or situation of fear was to be taken to confront the place and to see and learn for themselves that there was nothing there to be frightened of.

"When I saw a ghost, my father told me that there is no such thing, and he took to me to grave and said, 'Look, there is nothing,' and there really was nothing, and now I am never scared."

Boy, age 8

Children are also encouraged to be thankful whatever their circumstances and to think about the positive rather than negative aspects of the situation. For example, children stated that if they had lived through bombing or fighting, their parents encouraged them to be thankful to not have been killed. So, the importance of empathy was confirmed here. Children learn to look around and notice those who are worse off than they in order to be grateful for what they have. Some group participants said it was also very helpful to them to watch films of sad and desperate stories, which reminded them that there were people who were much worse off than themselves. So, thankfulness, coupled with empathy, are clearly qualities that children use to come to terms and cope with difficult events, and this actively promotes their emotional resilience.

"If we are afraid of something, we go and tell our mother and she embraces us, and she will go outside and say, 'Now what is it you are afraid of?'"

Girl, age 8

"God says, 'Look at who is worse off than you, not who is better off.'"

Women's group discussion

Happiness

"Once I was weaving a carpet and I suddenly fell over and fainted, and when I woke up I saw all my family around me. They asked me what happened, and I said I was just thinking about how bad my life is and wondering why God made me like this. Then I went to the doctor and he advised me to keep myself happy, so I keep myself busy and now I am OK."

Girl, age 13

"When the forces were bombing Kabul, one bomb landed near us and we were so scared because a part of our house was destroyed, but then we became happy that no one was killed or injured."

Boys' group discussion

As much as children talked about threats to their well being, they were also able to talk about the things and times that made them happy. Having happiness to balance suffering is important to children for coping. In the research the most commonly identified times of happiness for children were celebrations and ceremonies, such as family wedding parties, Eid and New Year. Other major times of happiness, especially for girls, were going to school, going on picnics with their families and having the time to play. The research also revealed that the physical and material environment is extremely important to children's happiness. Many of the factors they identified as important to their well being are natural (animals, flowers, trees and gardens) and material (new clothes, shoes, books, school bags, sweets and cakes). Entertainment also makes the children of Kabul happy, especially radio and television programs, and jokes and stories told by elders.

The nature of suffering

"The past is in the past; the running water will never come back."

Women's group discussion

"I'll tell you about my niece. One day a rocket landed on her house but it didn't explode. The girl was so frightened she became unconscious and they took her to the hospital. When she got to the hospital she woke up and was perfectly fine. She laughed and said, 'Oh look! I am still alive!' and she got up and carried on with her life."

Mothers' group discussion

People also discussed how the ability to maintain a positive attitude towards hardship is influenced by the nature of the suffering. As already mentioned, parents and children knew that they could cope with continuous suffering and — as long as they received good support and comfort — even grow stronger

"It is worse for someone to lose a part of their body than to lose someone in death. The loss of a part of your body, especially for a young boy or girl, so that he or she cannot work, this is a continuous sorrow and pain."

Boy, age 12

through the experience. Nevertheless people did draw a sharp distinction between suffering that is discrete and comes to an end quickly and suffering that is chronic. They said that the first is much easier to deal with because once a source of suffering ends, people are more likely to be able to cope with both the suffering and its consequences. In contrast, an ongoing problem such as sickness, disability or condition of poverty would involve a family in continuous suffering and be much more difficult to deal with. This understanding explains why research participants said that one of the most difficult challenges they had to deal with was missing relatives without knowing whether they were alive or dead. At least knowing the person as dead could help them confront the situation and begin to deal with it.

Social Relationships as a Source of Help

Once again children identified the people around them as one of the greatest sources of comfort and help in times of difficulty. Part of how children achieve overall well being is to have these people play a role in solving difficulties. The research participants made it clear that it is important *who* these people are and also *what they do*.

Families

"Strong children have strong parents."

Women's group discussion

Not surprisingly, children identified the same people who are important for their overall well being as those who are the most effective in solving their problems and helping them cope. Children stressed that the importance of a protector or guardian is not only that they provide for children but they are able to mediate in and solve children's problems. Once again children identified family members – mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and grandparents as well as the extended family – as the most important in helping them cope with difficulties and overcome fear or worry. Children in Kabul stated that when families are working well, with supportive relationships among members, they are more able to cope. This is shown by the number of stories in the research in which children state how parents have gone out of their way to protect and comfort their children. In fact, there was a strong understanding among group discussion members that whatever the event, it is the quality of family relationships that enables them to cope. For example, women participants in the research said that being married at an early age was not necessarily a bad thing, but it became bad if the girl was not supported and welcomed by her husband and in-laws. If, however, she was treated with gentleness, she would get used to her new life and come to enjoy it. Likewise if children passed through frightening situations with the encouragement and love of their families, they felt they could come to terms with what they were experiencing.

All members of the family can be influential in helping children cope, but it was interesting how often children mentioned their older brothers as key resource persons. Children turn to their older brothers when their parents are fighting or when there are problems they feel they cannot take to their parents. Being male, older and yet more of a friend than a parent, brothers can be extremely influential in the lives of their younger siblings.

"I am frightened of the way to school, so my older brother goes with me and says, 'look all the students go this way; you should not be scared.'"

Girl, age 7

"When I couldn't do my lessons I was sad because my teacher hit me, but then my older brother helped me."

Boy, age 10

"The daughter of our neighbor was kidnapped and they found her dead body in a destroyed house and I got so very frightened, but my mother kissed me and advised me not to walk alone, and I became OK."

Girl, age 10

"When I was going to school I saw the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] army and I was so frightened. When I arrived home I told that story to my family, but they advised me not to be frightened because they are humans like us, and now I am not scared of them."

Boy, age 7

"My aunt has a jinn, and once I went there to her house and she became crazy because her husband beat her a lot, and I was so afraid and I hid myself. Then my mother came and kissed me and washed my face and said, 'Don't be afraid or worried because she is sick,' and then I felt better."

Girl, age 11

"When I am afraid and I see my father, then I feel calm."

Boy, age 7

Other important relationships

Sometimes, however, children felt it was important to have someone beyond the home and family to mediate in their problems. They described how they could rely upon their teachers and friends for support. Children emphasized how important their peer relationships are for their ability to face difficult events and to withstand suffering. It was also noticeable how often children rely upon their neighbors to solve their problems, especially if the problem was within their family. One young boy, for example, told a story of how he hated looking after his baby sister because the child always cried. The boy did not feel he could go to his mother when the baby cried because she would be annoyed with him for disturbing the very time she was trying to have for herself by giving the baby to the boy in the first place. Instead the boy would go a few houses down the road and give the child to his neighbor to comfort. By doing this, he gave himself time to play without responsibilities.

"There was a child in our street who was always standing outside of his home. So our *mullah* came and took him under his control and, from that time, the child has been very attentive to his lessons and now respects the old people."

Grandfathers' group discussion

Mullahs have direct influence on children's ability to cope because they affect children's *tarbia* through moral and religious instruction. *Mullahs* take on a special role when they are called upon by families to help address particular

"It is our culture that when a child is sick or naughty his parents take him to the *mullah* and he becomes fine."

Grandfathers' group discussion

difficulties, such as children who develop unhealthy and anti-social personality traits, children who have particularly bad *tarbia* or children who have spiritual problems like being afraid of ghosts. *Mullahs* dispense extracts from the Koran as a treatment for such problems and these local remedies are highly valued.

Children of Kabul's Greatest Likes in Their Homes and Communities

1. flowers
2. apples
3. TV
4. cars
5. beautiful household furnishings
6. other fruit
7. school
8. clean water
9. friends' houses
10. one's own house
11. trees
12. rivers
13. beautiful buildings

Means of Comfort

"If a person is blind, we help them across the street; if a person is deaf, we try to make them understand, and if someone is poor, we try to assist them. So, it is the same with all children — we help them."

Mothers' group discussion

It is the advice, encouragement, time and protection, which children receive from family members, friends and neighbors, that helps them cope with suffering. As discussed before, these are all considered important for children's overall well being. These methods are particularly employed when children need special comfort in order to overcome suffering. Children said that communication in the extended family, in which fears and worries were explained and confronted, were essential to not develop negative feelings. In addition, children stated how important it was to share their suffering with others, and to receive material comfort.

Sharing suffering

"When we have a tree and take care of it and give it water and clean around it, it will grow strong and give good fruit. If not, it will be sick and will not look fresh and it will be damaged. It is the same with people who have negative feelings. If no one is there to share or help the sorrow, they will get ochdar*."*

Mothers' group discussion

"It helps if first someone finds out what you are afraid of — like a plane or a mine or a ghost — and then they take you to a safe place."

Boy, age 9

A key way children cope with difficulties is to share their suffering with relatives, neighbors and friends who can comfort, advise and distract them from dwelling on their suffering and help them feel thankful and courageous.

"It is good to show your negative feeling because then people know you are suffering and they can comfort you."

Grandfathers' group discussion

Sharing suffering does not necessarily mean speaking about the suffering. Indeed, there is a strong belief in Kabul that one should not remember or talk too much about a painful event or situation. Discussion group participants said they went out of their way to avoid talking about suffering itself, seeing [the talk] as putting *salt on wounds.* Instead their comfort was to draw attention away — to the future or to people worse off, so they would be grateful for what they did have.

"Being busy in a good way can remove pain sorrow and suffering because working itself decreases worry."

Girl, age uncertain

For people in Kabul an effective way of sharing suffering is in knowing that others have been in similarly difficult situations and can understand. It is important that people recognize when someone is suffering by reading the signs of emotional distress. The fact that there are so many words and expressions for different degrees of emotional suffering shows that people in Kabul know well what it is to suffer and how to recognize it in others. People quickly recognize emotional pain and negative feelings in others; children recognize it in themselves, in their peers and their parents; and adults recognize

"When children see that other children are coping, they will learn from them."

Girl, age 17

it in children. Recognition goes hand in hand with action, and people support each other by sharing each other's circumstances by sympathizing, comforting and healing each other.

"My daughter was pestering me for new clothes for Eid, but then she heard that I was sick and she stopped her demands and said, 'No it is enough for me that my mother is alive; I don't want anything.'"

Mothers' group discussion

Once again empathy is an important factor in being able to share suffering, although it does have its negative aspects in that children can take on additional suffering because of this quality. When empathy *is* positive it, as an aspect of sharing, also lessens the burden on individuals because they can see that they are all in the same situation. Empathy can also spur people to action trying to make things better for the people around them.

"My son knew that if other children saw him when he had cut his hand they would have a lot of worry, so he said to me, 'Mother let's pretend we are going to the bazaar. You wear your good *burqa* and don't notice me in the street, and I'll meet you in the clinic.'"

Mothers' group discussion

Empathy activates people on behalf of children — to comfort and support them — and children themselves emphasize and take action for others. Children were very clear that when they saw parents upset they would take special care in their household tasks in order to make them happy. They also described how, without having been asked, they would enable their fathers to pray by setting the prayer mat and bringing water, knowing that prayer would help their fathers and thus the situation of the whole family. In other words, children not only receive comfort, but also take an active role in giving it to others.

Material assistance

"During the war years we had to leave our homes early in the morning and we passed long distances by foot and we couldn't return for a long time and we got very bad memories. But some friends and relatives helped us by giving us money, clothes and food because they were our friends and they had sympathy for us and they helped us a lot."

Grandfathers' group discussion

"When we are worrying, our parents and friends tell us amazing stories and they buy us things and we feel better."

Girl, age 7

People in Kabul help each other cope with many forms of practical assistance. At one end of the spectrum, parents and children alike saw small material gifts such as sweets, new clothes, books, pens and toys as a key means of comforting children when they are distressed. At the other end of the spectrum, when in economic difficulties, people rely upon personal relationships through which they can borrow money and, thus, solve their problems, although this strategy was also associated with some shame. Children quite clearly stated that it was better if material assistance came from within their own family, as receiving or borrowing from non-relatives made them feel embarrassed. Some of the children who participated in the research said that one of things they disliked doing most was being sent by parents to borrow things and money from neighbors.

"When we are worried, our parents buy us as much as we want. They hug us and then we feel better."

Girl, age 12

For this reason, people saw their economic situation as a key factor in how they were able to cope with difficulties. People mentioned that families who have enough money can solve the problems they face, and they can also help others around them. And, parents with money may have more time to devote to the development of the *tarbia* of their children. Clearly, richer families do not have to send their children to work or to borrow and, in general, they can be more confident about their children's future security, thus minimizing the risks to their children. This is why the *wasta* of wider family relations is so important: because through *wasta* people are able to access the resources of others in order to cope.

"I was once in big debt, and I got a lot of pain because ... every day people came to my house asking for their money because they also had need of it. I didn't know what to do until, finally, a friend sent me some money and I could get out of debt."

Grandfathers' group discussion

The Impact of the Wider Context

"We worry when we hear that a member of our family has died or is lost, when we hear that fighting is about to start again, when we have no money, and when we get scared about the Taliban and airplanes. We don't worry when there is peace and money."

Boy, age 12

Just as the wider context in which children live has an impact on their overall well being, so too the context makes a difference to how people can cope with difficulties. Research participants identified three main contextual factors as influencing their ability to cope: the political stability of the country, the economic situation in the country and their physical surroundings.

"If there is peace, people can find work and the memory of having work and money will help them with the memories of having war and no money."

Grandfathers' group discussion

Children were convinced that peace and stability in the country at large would help them achieve distance from suffering. With peace, children in Kabul hope and believe that their country can move on from a period of fighting and poverty to a new era of security and opportunity, which will reduce the causes of distress and give them opportunities to heal the wounds of the past. Children saw peace as linked to greater opportunities for economic security for their families. This in turn would reduce the threats posed by poverty, and give them the financial resources to solve their own and other's problems.

"I don't feel afraid when we have electricity."

Girl, age 6

Just as the physical surroundings can be a risk to children's well being in Kabul, so too can the environment be an important source of coping mechanisms. Good surroundings can help children in their household tasks, and reduce the fears they have about physical injury. Rebuilt infrastructure can help children forget about the destruction of war, and reduce their fears of ghosts which they believe live in destroyed houses. Clean manmade surroundings help children with their own cleanliness and *tarbia* as well as physical health.

At the same time the natural environment is a major source of children's social and emotional contentment. Considering manmade surroundings and the natural environment, children stated that gardens, flowers, trees, parks, animals, spaces to play, cleanliness, spring time, the availability of water, safe and quiet streets, beautiful buildings and possessions are all very important for their happiness. This is because these things are good unto themselves and because they promote social relationships, relaxation and fun. As cited earlier with regard to the *Happy Day* activity, children in Kabul love going for picnics to enjoy the beautiful surroundings and to be with their families and friends.

Personal Characteristics

Lastly, there are aspects of children's own personal make-up — physical health, age and gender — found to make a difference to their coping ability.

Physical strength

"All resilience is in the body. If the body is strong, you can withstand anything. Secondly, the eyes which have seen a lot of war and got used to it have high resistance.

"Youth boys' group discussion

My uncle's house is in Paghman. One day we went there for a picnic, we picked apples from the trees and we ate them, and we were so very happy."

Boy, age 12

Children and parents alike said that when children are strong and healthy they are more likely to be able to cope with difficult situations than if they are weak and ill. Physical strength allows people to endure risks and suffering courageously. This is particularly the case because, as has been discussed, when children pass through difficulties and develop negative feelings, they often become sick. Parents said that physical strength was a crucial factor that prevented children from becoming sick even if the child had gone through a bad experience or situation.

If, however, children do develop bad feelings and sickness as a result of their experiences, many of the healing and coping mechanisms are based on physical strength. People remarked on the importance of giving children what they referred to as *warm food* (typically almonds) in order to build up their emotional and physical health after a disturbing event or situation.

In severe and prolonged cases of distress, parents seek emotional healing for their children through medical means. This is because they are seeking relief from the physical pain brought by emotional suffering, and because there are a number of medicines that can be bought on the open market in Kabul which are advertised to treat both the mental and physical symptoms of psychological problems.

Age

"We adults suffer a lot because we used to have a good life and we lost it, but our children suffer less because they are used to war and rockets here."

Grandfathers' group discussion

Children in the research gave clear examples of their knowledge of suffering and its consequences for themselves and their families. As discussed above, children talked about a high degree of empathy for the feelings of their parents, taking action to comfort them and help them cope in unstated and often

unrecognized ways. Parents, however, seemed to be of the opinion that being young, children lacked real understanding of problems. They also said that children's carefreeness shielded them from the full impact of suffering. Parents said that in general they felt children were more resilient to difficulties than adults because of their youth and naiveté.

Gender

There was a strong understanding among research participants that gender not only affects the experiences people have, but also their ability to cope. Women and girls suggested that they were more likely to suffer and develop negative feelings than men because they were more likely to have time to stop and think about their problems, and because they were often confined in the house with nothing to distract them from getting worried and depressed. On the other hand it was recognized that because men and boys were outside more they were more often confronted with the problems of the world and that they too suffered, but just expressed and felt it in different, less obvious ways.

"Sometimes men suffer more because they go outside and they see the bad conditions people are in; they see children begging and it makes them feel bad if they don't have money for their own children."

Girl, age 15

"Girls have more pain than boys because girls are timid and have more stress than boys, but boys are careless and don't care so much and they go outside and forget and they don't care like girls."

Women's group discussion

"Men can go out and talk with other men or stay in front of their shops, so they relieve their sorrow and pain more than women; but women are in the home all the time, so they suffer a lot. But if a man doesn't have work and is in the house all the time as well, it is worse for him."

Girl, age 16

"It must be hard to be a boy because when our brothers come home they say: 'We've seen all the situation outside,' and they see beggars and disabled people, which we don't see."

Girl, age 15

What the Children of Kabul Say Is Good for Their Hearts and for Healing Bad Feelings

1. parent's words
2. teacher's words
3. getting new clothes
4. peace
5. doing well at school
6. getting money
7. being healthy
8. loving your family and them loving you
9. having guests
10. eating fruit
11. meeting friends
12. listening to a joke or story
13. going on a trip
14. eating meat and rice

Negative Coping

As stated, children and parents who joined in the project were clear about what they saw as the resources to help children remain protected and cared for through challenges and difficulties. However, another dimension to the topic of coping was the recognition that what people might do to protect children in the short term could have long term negative consequences. In the course of the research, children and parents mentioned three examples of negative coping mechanisms. Parents labeled them as negative because, although they had used them at one time, they had yielded bad results and ramifications in the long run. Children said they were negative because they had caused them additional distress and bad feelings.

Overprotection

As discussed above, the degree of protection a child is given during difficult events or in dangerous situations is a factor in their ability to cope. Thus parents involved in the research suggested that a bad circumstance in itself need not threaten children's well being. Rather, it is how children are protected and comforted through the situation that makes a difference. Some parents, however, seem to take the need for protecting children to extremes. In the course of the research, a number of cases were found where parents, made nervous by war and displacement and rumors of disappearances in the neighborhood, refused to let their children leave the house and placed them under heavy restrictions. This was particularly true in the case of girls, and related to the sense of security people felt about their own home, as opposed to the threats of the outside world. Another method parents said they used in protecting their children was physical punishment. Parents explained that if children disobeyed advice on how to protect themselves, or got themselves into dangerous situations, they would hit them to enforce the lesson.

"One of my neighbors doesn't go to school. When I asked why her mother said that her eldest daughter went to school in the time of Rabbani, and one day she didn't come home. All the other students came back, but this girl didn't, and she was never seen again. Then the mother said, 'Because of this, I don't want to leave my small girl in school.'"

Girl, age 17

This, however, was a topic where children and adults had different ideas. Children suggested that being kept in doors and being hit was a source of further distress, while many parents stated that these practices were in children's best interests, protecting them from further harm. This divergence of opinion was even more marked in the case of girls, who are heavily protected and yet become depressed and anxious by being kept indoors for long periods of time. Sometimes parents also concluded that these restrictions had had negative consequences and they had regretted imposing them on their children.

Shielding children from the truth

"My son was very afraid of the airplanes, and when the plane came he used to try and shoot it down. So I hugged him and told him that the airplane will bring sweets, and then I gave him a sweet and told him that the plane sent it for him and he shouldn't fear [the airplane]."

Mothers' group discussion

Parents stated that they wanted to shield their children from bad news and knowledge, and so would often keep the full details of an event or situation from their children. Yet, in so protecting children, parents admitted that they may increase their own emotional pain by constantly deflecting children's questions. Children were quite clear also about the negative consequences of this strategy. They said that they often knew what it was their parents were shielding them from; they said this increased their pain and also their resentment against their parents.

One case study from the research illustrated this point well. A woman spoke of her despair of having her children turn against her for not telling them the truth when their father died. Instead of telling her children about their father's death, she moved the family to another part of town, thinking that her children would forget about their father if they moved to a new place and away from reminders in their old home. When the children eventually found out, they were extremely angry with her. She described her present life as a misery with her children constantly blaming and condemning her. In this and other discussions, parents recognized that keeping children from the truth can have very negative consequences for family life, and it also contradicted what they and the children stated was an effective way of coping with frightening and distressing things, which was to confront their fears.

"If you avenge something, you feel very light and your heart becomes cool, then you feel comfortable."

Boys' group discussion

Revenge

"A mother's voice can make a child feel *ochdar* and want revenge if the mother is always reminding a child of a bad event."

Boy, age 17

Finally, taking revenge was cited as a negative coping strategy. On the one hand, some parents and children said what a source of comfort it was to think about and take revenge for something bad that had happened to them. On the other hand, wanting revenge was seen as a form of *ochdar* — a resentment that could build up physical illness and pain. It was also seen as creating social problems, establishing enmity and placing children under risk of revenge in return.

"Because of some revenge we committed, we have many enemies and we cannot let our daughters go out of the house."

Mothers' group discussion

Conclusion

Despite all the difficulties and challenges faced by children in Kabul, there is clear evidence that children and their parents have strong resources for surviving difficult events and situations, and for protecting and preserving the well being of children, even in appalling conditions. Because of this, the impact of the threats faced and dealt with are not entirely negative for children's development. For example, poverty may have less effect on a child because she or he has supportive parents who talk about the problems and comforts the child with love. Living through war may be less damaging for a child if the family moves quickly from the war zone and receives support from extended family. An early marriage may not be damaging if the girl is protected

by her husband and not forced to take on heavy household responsibilities. The loss of a family member may be easier to bear if the person is actually dead and buried rather than missing.

Further, some of children's qualities may even be enhanced when they must face such situations. Children who experience fear may become courageous; children who experience loss may be able to empathize with the pain of others; children who experience despair may develop a lot of hope about the future.

Generally, children and parents seem to look for solutions for social and emotional problems within their own resources, primarily within their own families. They rely on the actions, advice, assistance and encouragement of immediate family — and friends, too — in reaching practical solutions within their own context and abilities. Children thus also learn to rely on the people around them to help them with their problems. Other resources for coping come from the child's physical strength, faith, courage, happiness and morality.

It is noticeable how the qualities parents want for children's well being are the very resources that help children cope in times of difficulty. There is clearly a strong perception that by developing faith, *tarbia*, courage and responsibility, children will be strong and able to respond positively to the risks and threats they face. In other words, children in Kabul are being brought up to cope, and parents invest in an upbringing that helps children develop coping mechanisms and strategies.

Thus Afghan parents often confront difficult events and situations in a way that shields their children, while also teaching the children how to cope when bad things do happen. They start such instruction in the early years of life, when a child is encouraged to pray and know the *Kalima* — the verse children say they use in time of danger and fear. Having the resources to cope is part of the developmental goals parents have for their children's well being.

Yet, despite very strong opinions and well-defined understandings of children's well being and coping, parents and children may not be able to fulfill their own ideals. Parents talked about how the realities of daily life meant that they spent most of their time in economic or household work activities, without time or energy to talk with their children. And often they need their children to work too. In addition, many parents talked of problems of their own, which prevented them from focusing on their children. For example, a woman suffering from abuse in her home said she did not have the capacity to think about her children's protection as well. Failing to achieve their own ideals was an additional source of pain for children and adults. In addition children can feel the negative long term effects of their parent's coping strategies. So while acknowledging the strong resilience of children in Kabul, it is important not to overlook the sometimes less than adequate aspects of their coping abilities.

Recommendations for Support Programs for Children in Kabul and Afghanistan

Guide to Interventions

What should be done?

The **Children of Kabul** project shows many important qualities that adults and children alike feel should — and can — be enhanced and supported to improve children's well being. Improving these qualities can be the objectives of psychosocial programs for Afghan children.

Children's well being. Qualities that children and parents want children to develop:

- Good *tarbia*: politeness, respect, hospitality
- Courage
- Religious knowledge and faith
- Responsibility
- Good health
- Cleanliness
- Good feelings: happiness, hopefulness, freshness
- Positive relationships, especially within families

Children's opportunities. Opportunities recognized as good for children:

- School and education
- Learning vocational skills
- Taking on responsibilities
- Looking after animals and the environment
- Play
- Being with friends
- Enjoying the physical environment
- Enjoying social occasions and celebrations
- Offering hospitality
- Access to the media
- Expressing opinions and experiences

The quality of relationships. Relationships with and between children should be based on:

- Spending time with each other
- Listening to and answering questions
- Sharing difficulties
- Giving advice and encouragement
- Solving problems
- Love and comfort
- Care and protection
- Sympathy and empathy
- Consistent and non-abusive discipline

The **Children of Kabul** research also shows that most families already have resources to cope with many of their problems, and that these resources can and should be strengthened.

Coping resources that can be strengthened:

- Supportive and loving family life
- A safe home
- A safe neighborhood and safe clean place to play
- A positive attitude to suffering with faith, morality, courage and thankfulness
- Confronting problems and being reassured about them
- Opportunities to meet others in the same situation, to share suffering and problems through empathy and good social networks
- Good friendships and neighborhood relations
- Good health
- Political and economic security
- Restored and beautiful environments
- Allowing children to offer comfort to other children and their parents

Additionally, the negative impacts on children's lives must be reduced. The threats they face should be decreased and some of the negative impacts of their circumstances must be addressed and healed.

Risks to children's well being to be reduced:

- War
- Displacement
- Poverty
- Family loss
- Family separation
- Family tensions: for example, domestic violence, drug abuse in the home, abuse of adopted children
- Lack of access to schools and pressure in schools, including teasing, bullying and abusive teachers
- Unattended sickness and disability
- Gender discrimination
- Early marriage
- Heavy and exploitative work
- Kidnapping
- Sexual abuse
- Damaged, dirty, inadequate and dangerous physical environment; destroyed houses, lack of water, open wells, military posts
- Busy traffic
- Ghosts from lack of proper burial

The negative consequences of these risks that must be healed:

- Drug use
- War-like games
- Lack of courage
- Disruption of *tarbia*
- Disruption of schooling
- Physical sickness
- Serious mental illness
- Separated families — should be reunited
- Negative feelings: grief, sorrow, anxiety, resentment, fear

Lastly, the coping strategies that people have developed which may have negative consequences for families should be addressed.

Negative coping to be changed:

- Heavy use of physical punishment
- Violence
- Revenge
- Not telling the whole truth
- Overprotection

How is this to be done?

Many of these conditions, circumstances, and sought-for qualities lend themselves to direct action. For example:

The physical environment

- Road safety campaigns, in cooperation with community leaders and traffic police, to raise children's awareness of how they can protect themselves in busy and chaotic traffic and to raise drivers' awareness of children at risk.
- Neighborhood campaigns to reduce physical threats like open wells and rubbish dumps, and to promote beautiful spots such as gardens.
- Public buildings and facilities used by children — especially playgrounds — can maintain safety standards.
- Child-focused landmine education can continue, and improve, to increase awareness and to support networks to ensure that knowledge and lessons learned are put into practice.

Promoting social interaction and enjoyment

- Add to the number of non-school settings where children can play and meet safely.
- Increase safe recreational activities and occasions — for example, picnics in children's groups — especially for girls.

- Work with government and NGOs to increase media outputs and outlets for children.
- Promote *Child-to-Child* learning and action as a key strategy for working with children, especially through youth, to encourage and enable youth to become positive role models and friends for children.
- Raise awareness of lonely and excluded children and of the need to include them in activities.

Directly strengthening family structures

- Invest more resources in family tracing and reunification.
- Train staff of return and repatriation agencies to pay more attention to separated children and the issues they face.
- Improve schemes for identifying particularly vulnerable families and for providing sustainable support.

Preventing abuse

- Lobby and monitor child employers to provide safe, non-exploitative and non-abusive workplaces.
- Promote non-physical forms of punishment with all caregivers, so physical punishment becomes the exception rather than the norm.
- Improve security in residential areas and near schools, and remove military posts from these areas.
- Research and share information about the experience of being an orphan in Afghanistan, with focus on the abuse and discrimination adopted children face.
- Research and share information on the prevalence of sexual abuse and the consequences for girls and boys alike.

Information and campaigns

- Engage children and youth as well as their parents, teachers, and *mullahs* in anti-drug use campaigns.

Other changes can be achieved by recognizing the links among all aspects of children's well being.

Health

- Continue investment and capacity building in the health sector to offer better services to more children.
- Explore and resolve the factors, including family financial status, that prevent children's access to health care.
- Strengthen Afghan health professionals' capacity to recognize and treat psychosocial needs by encouraging social or religious coping mechanisms and not prescribing drugs — especially for children.
- Study the practice of self-medication, which many Afghans undertake for psychosomatic symptoms, and work for responsible drug prescription and use.
- Improve links and dialogue among agencies offering psychosocial support and those offering mental health services.
- Research and share information on how mental illness is experienced, diagnosed and labeled in Afghan society.
- Review existing mental health treatment capacity in Afghanistan, and seek to upgrade specialized services for the seriously mentally ill.
- Improve referral systems among families with children with disabilities, and among organizations working on disability issues.
- Encourage all children to respect and include disabled peers in their interactions.

Education

- Increase investment in education, providing more children with better opportunities for quality education.
- Through training and capacity building courses, introduce teachers to the concepts of support for children's

social and emotional well being and protection, which can be ensured in schools and non-formal education settings, and through their own teaching.
- Evaluate educational services for child-focused and psychosocial support qualities.
- Lobby against the use of physical punishment in schools, and educate teachers about alternative disciplinary techniques.
- Promote strategies and policies for flexible formal education that includes all children, including older youth as well as children with disabilities and street working children.
- Strengthen vocational education.
- Explore ways to support teachers' emotional and social needs as well as their continuing education and training needs.

Support for families and parents

- Create and ensure follow through on opportunities for parents to discuss and compare parenting issues and practices.
- Promote the use of grandparents' experience and status to help children.
- Share **Children of Kabul** findings and other child-focused research with families to help them see things from children's points of view.
- Create and promote early childhood development (ECD) programs, which stimulate the care and learning of very young children. Assess existing child care arrangements, such as kindergartens, to make sure they are child-focused and positive.
- Explore and promote effective social work practices so there are effective interventions for families who do not have the capacity to solve their own problems. These interventions may be community-based or involved specialized social workers.
- Study existing microcredit programs and other forms of economic support for vulnerable families with special attention to the positive and negative impacts on children.

Counseling, healing and religious support for children

- Inform and involve children in the ceremonies whereby houses are cleansed of ghosts through prayer.
- Promote the inclusion of *mullahs* and mosque congregations in community mobilization and support activities.
- Base child care initiatives on the principles of Islam.
- Encourage respect for religion through prayers and recitations from the Koran in children's activities.
- Seek and promote understanding of psychosocial support that is derived from spiritual healing, visits to shrines and the use of amulets.
- If counseling is offered to individual children by professionals not within their immediate circle of friends and family, those professionals should build on indigenous models of dealing with negative feelings such as promoting children's thankfulness, courage and morality.

Displacement and return

- Improve the monitoring of security incidents that force families to move from an area.
- Take action to decrease discrimination in access to services and the causal attitudes towards displaced or returned families, especially children.
- Include psychosocial support projects for children in interventions for displaced families.

Protection and human rights

- Work to ensure that Afghan children are recognized as right holders with entitlements to protections from abuse and insecurity of all kinds, and to deny impunity to perpetrators of any abuses against children.
- Invest in child protection capacity at the local and national level.
- Encourage children's participation in their own protection through children's clubs, *Child-to-Child* strategies and youth work.

Who should be responsible?

Responsibility for these interventions, many of which are relevant for all children in Afghanistan, lies at every level of society with all levels supporting each other and working together for the care and protection of Afghan children.

First, the government of Afghanistan is responsible for creating and implementing legislation that protects children's rights, including their psychosocial well being. One way to support such action is by ensuring that the new constitution reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was signed by the Afghan government in 1994. This is especially important because more than half of the Afghan population is under 18, and is entitled to protection under the provisions of the CRC.

Attention to child rights is, in fact, relevant for almost all government ministries and national coordination structures, including the transitional Consultative and Advisory groups. Currently, children are considered primarily in the ministries of health and education, while special groups of vulnerable children, such as street working children and orphans, are dealt with by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. But, as the **Children of Kabul** project has shown, children are also important stakeholders in areas of livelihoods and social protection, justice, urban planning and human rights, and their need for social and emotional well being must be considered and addressed by all entities working together. International support and advocacy must continue so that there is every possible means for the Afghan government and people to prioritize the concerns — and rights — of their children.

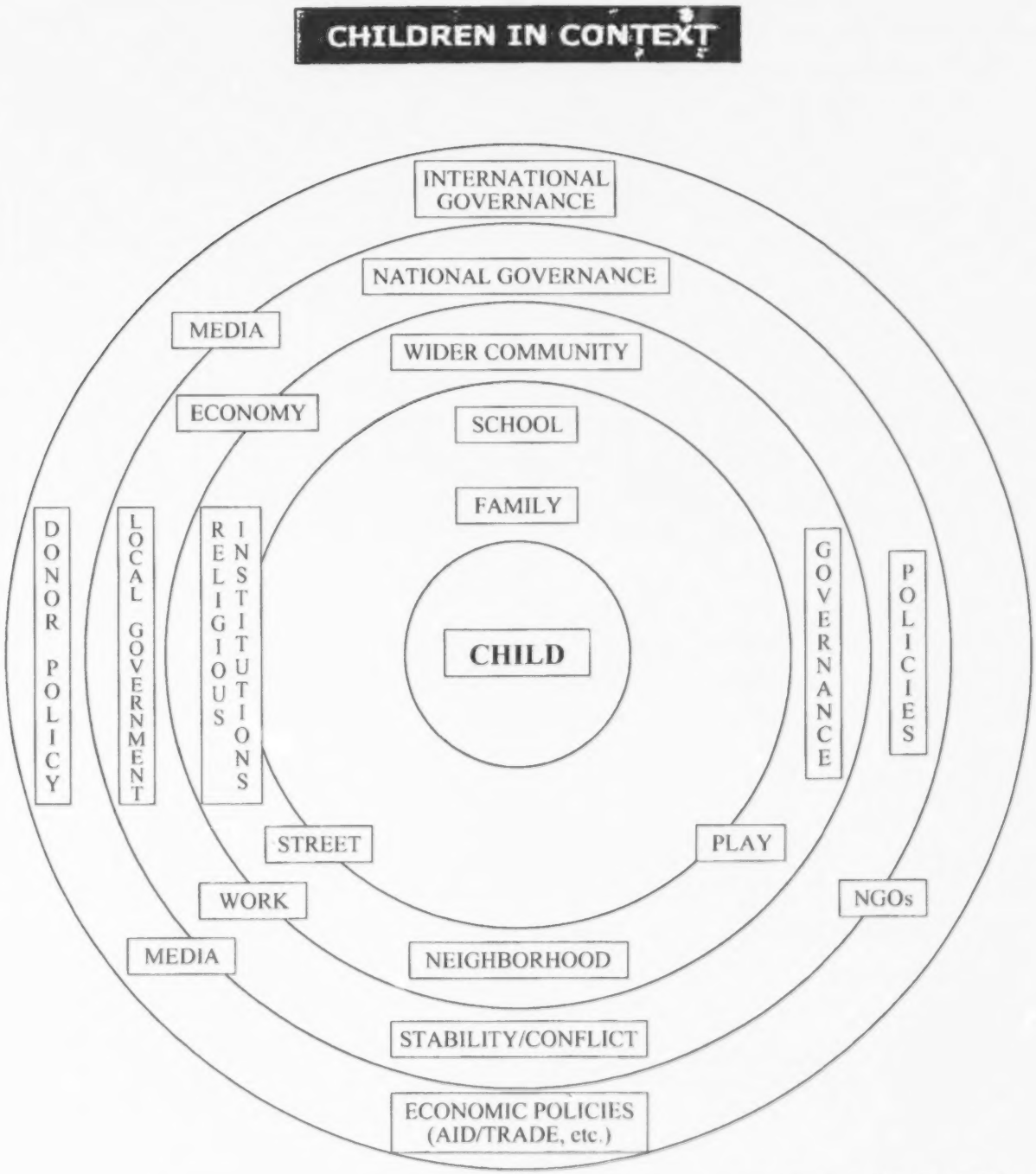
Second, children's well being depends upon supportive and protective local communities in which all children — including those who are in situations of exploitation, abuse and vulnerability — can thrive. The **Children of Kabul** project demonstrates that it is possible to increase responsibility for children's well being within communities through structures such as *shuras*, parents' committees, and school-based parent-teacher organizations.

Third, children's well being depends on the capacity of primary care givers to support their children in situations of harm. Families in the research stated that their economic situation often influenced whether they can provide such support. Thus there should be discussions of how vocational training and microcredit projects, for example, raise the capacity of families to provide for their children. Securing households' livelihoods may be a way of increasing the social and emotional support families offer for children. These links should be explored and acted upon.

Finally, children achieve effective well being when they themselves are active participants in identifying and resolving the threats they face, both individually and collectively. For example, children can help each other to cross roads in a safe way or, through *Child-to-Child* groups, share and solve other simple, solvable problems. As the **Children of Kabul** project demonstrates, it is very important that children's views are taken seriously, and that they are allowed to lead action and improvement.

Policy recommendations

When Save the Children Alliance members and UNICEF give suggestions as to the best way of supporting children, they often use in the following diagram. The diagram shows how a child lives in a complex context, which is comprised of a variety of relationships and situations. A better understanding of children's lives requires a better understanding of the overall context and how its different aspects affect children.



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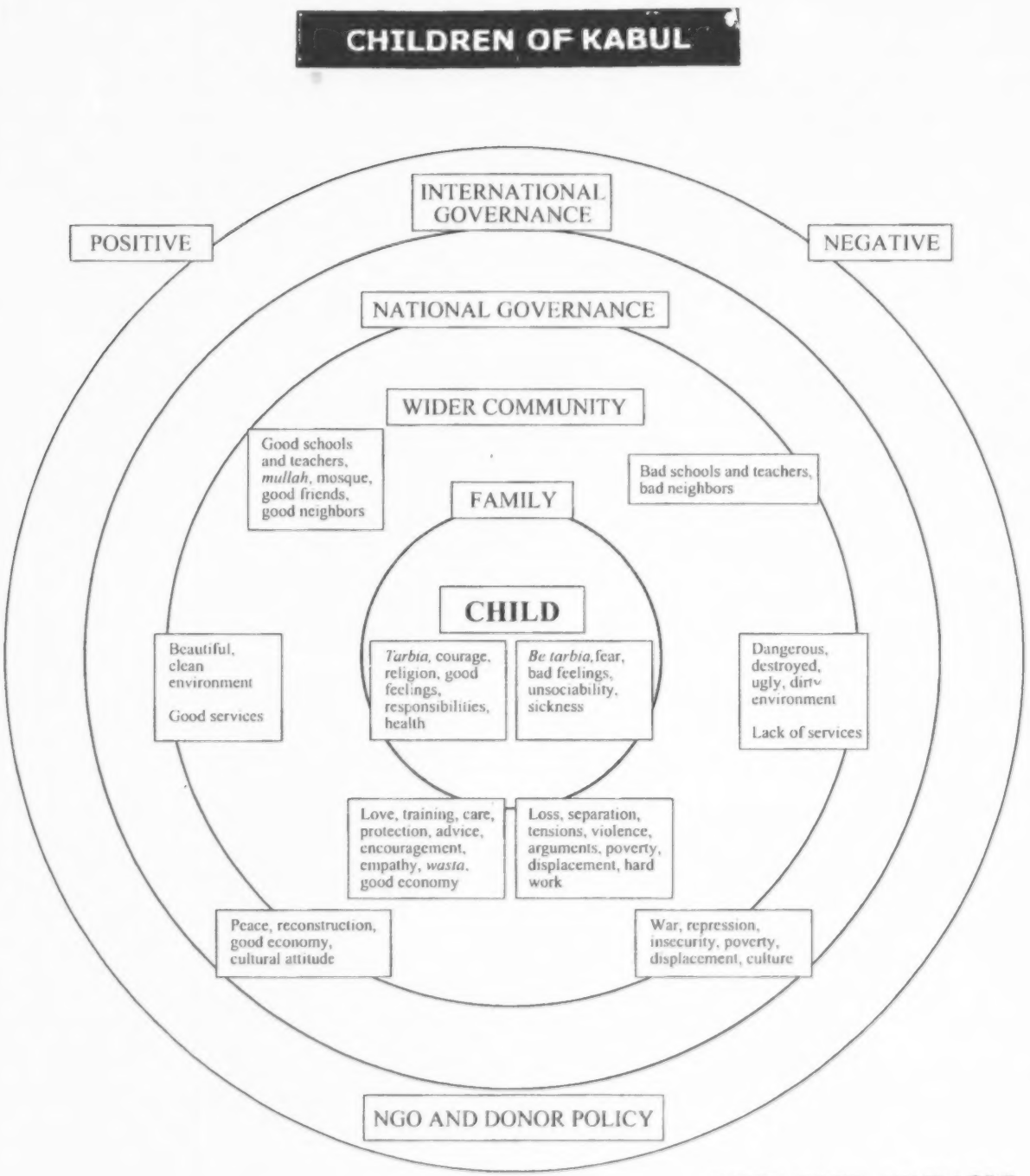
With this general conception of children's lives, the **Children of Kabul** research helps us understand the specific life context of Afghan children living in the city. Using the information gathered about specific children's qualities like *tarbia*, courage, faith and having positive feelings; about the large influence of family relationships in the lives of children; about the impact of the physical environment and the impact of history, including war, and poverty, it is possible to view the lives of Kabul's children more precisely and clearly per the following diagram.


CHILDREN OF KABUL
INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE
POSITIVE
NEGATIVE
NATIONAL GOVERNANCE
WIDER COMMUNITY
Good schools and teachers, *mullah*, mosque, good friends, good neighbors
Bad schools and teachers, bad neighbors
FAMILY
CHILD
Beautiful, clean environment
Good services
Tarbia, courage, religion, good feelings, responsibilities, health
Be tarbia, fear, bad feelings, unsociability, sickness
Dangerous, destroyed, ugly, dirty environment
Lack of services
Love, training, care, protection, advice, encouragement, empathy, *wasta*, good economy
Loss, separation, tensions, violence, arguments, poverty, displacement, hard work
Peace, reconstruction, good economy, cultural attitude
War, repression, insecurity, poverty, displacement, culture
NGO AND DONOR POLICY

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Throughout the **Children of Kabul** initiative, children and parents described their world. The research shows how important it is to be aware of people's own perspectives and beliefs, as well as the context of their lives, to comprehend fully what an event or situation or fact means to them, and how it affects their lives. For example, by knowing about the concept of *tarbia*, we can understand the complex impact of war or displacement or poverty for children because of the impact it may have on their *tarbia*. Or, by understanding how important it is for children in Kabul to have household responsibilities, it is possible to see how severe the impact of damaged surroundings is because this affects children's ability to fulfill these obligations.

Yet the purpose of the **Children of Kabul** was not only to provide information and insight, but also to influence development programming for children by basing it on the values and realities of Afghan children and caregivers. NGOs, donors, policy makers, teachers, *mullahs*, parents and children comprise the context in which children in Kabul live and develop. All, therefore, have a responsibility to make sure, they are positive influences for children, not negative ones, and that they support the positive dimensions of children's life contexts, not the harmful ones.

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Recommendation one: adopt a holistic approach to work with children

Holistic suggests taking the broadest possible view on something. The **Children of Kabul** findings lay the groundwork for a broad understanding of what it is like to be a child in Kabul — the experiences a child encounters, and how she or he understands, interprets and reacts to those experiences. So, with a holistic perspective, many new possibilities for support for children open up.

As highlighted throughout the **Children of Kabul** findings, the people of Afghanistan, like people everywhere, have social, emotional and moral priorities for their lives — that is, they view their own lives holistically. It is not enough that children are clothed and fed and kept alive. Parents want their children to be fulfilled, to have faith, to have good behavior, to develop into respectable and appreciated people who are useful to their families and society. Parents and children want to believe that they have the chance of a successful future, and they desire a present that is happy and free from worry and fear.

So one of the consequences of a holistic view and approach to children's well being is the recognition of the rights of children to dignity and to social and emotional fulfillment. Too often assistance to children starts and stops with attention to their basic survival needs. The importance of this help cannot be denied, but investment must also be made in families' and communities' own priorities for the development and protection of their children. This is why psychosocial programs, which are designed to address children's social and emotional well being, are so important. Psychosocial programs recognize that, whatever their circumstances, people have values for social interaction, behavior and attitudes. Accordingly, opportunities must be created to allow people to achieve results and standards as well as they would like. This may manifest itself in various ways. For example, in a hospital where children are receiving life-saving treatment, there could also be opportunities for children to study or to move around offering comfort for other children who are ill. Or, in an IDP camp there could be provision for children to play, and for mothers to come together in groups to share the problems they face caring for children in such a setting.

Second, taking people's social and emotional priorities into account is useful because it provides a set of indicators, a set of standards that people want for their own life. Often interventions for children come with quantitative indicators: "How many children?" "How often?" Success is judged by numbers alone rather than through qualitative results. If, however, support projects for children were judged in terms of how they improve children's *tarbia* or build children's courage and faith, or on the level of protection afforded, those who work for children's well being could judge their impact based on criteria that are important to children themselves. For international NGOs, a broad holistic approach certainly could open up understanding of how their initiatives may, in fact, be having impacts that are considered negative by participants and beneficiaries, and why interventions may be failing in social terms. For example, if parents in Kabul are worried about the consequences of play

outside the home for children, they may not welcome a new playground in their area and may not encourage their children to use it even if one is built for them.

Thus, holistically-focused indicators are not relevant for psychosocial projects alone, but can improve the quality of *all* interventions for children. For example, if a shelter project for vulnerable families is evaluated for whether it promotes children's happiness, or decreases the burden of their household responsibilities, there is then greater insight into how such projects impact children overall.

Designing development activities and projects with the goal of addressing children's needs is, of course, ambitious. But, the most important starting point for any development initiative is the recognition that all interventions do have social and emotional consequences for children, both good and bad.

Holistically-defined indicators are also useful because they allow an expanded definition of vulnerability. Vulnerability is often judged through measurements like "lack of an adult male in the house", "female headed household" or "only eats meat once a month." These indicators tell us nothing about how these conditions are experienced. For example, the child of a widowed mother, who spends time talking to and comforting her children, and who has good support in raising them from the extended family, may be far less vulnerable to anxiety, worry and bad *tarbia* than a child with two parents who fight all the time and spend no quality time with the child. Or, children in a poor family who are able to think about things they are grateful for in their life may be far less vulnerable to sadness and grief than children in a rich family who are always comparing themselves to their more prosperous neighbors. Again, understanding people's values allows for a better definition of the vulnerabilities that are of concern, and how these vulnerabilities are mitigated and coped with.

Finally, a holistic perspective helps identify and understand problems. For example, if in a classroom a teacher is faced with a particularly rude and anti-social child, using a holistic perspective would help the teacher understand that the child may have bad behavior, not because she or he is lazy or rude, but because there are tensions in the family, the family has been displaced or the child is out on the streets with unruly children all evening. Changing the child's behavior for the better cannot be effected, then, until the causal problem is addressed or, at least, recognized.

A holistic perspective also helps understanding of the full extent and impact of problems. For example, as children in Kabul have described, the negative effects of war are multiple and complicated. They include national security, the environment, and relationships as well as feelings and memories. A child is affected by the negative impact of war on his or her environment and on national politics as well as by the direct consequences on his or her mental status. Thus, it is clear that interventions to improve a child's psychological well being — while family life, the environment and personal security are still at risk — will not be as successful as holistic interventions that work on multiple levels. For example, people in Kabul understand that poverty manifests itself as a child working on the street in bad conditions, but also as tensions within the family, with parents having no time to interact with their children; children being unable to go to school; a community without adequate water and a government unable to provide even basic health care for its children. Addressing the effects of poverty must include consideration of all these factors.

It is often easier to focus on intervention for children alone in the midst of such complex problems. For example, it is tempting to build an orphanage for separated children and to fill the orphanage with toys and books; tempting to work in a drop-in center for street working children and to give them free medical treatment; tempting to offer one-to-one counseling for a war-affected child so she can talk through memories and fears. But, to act in these ways is to deny the influence of children's life contexts on their problem. Perhaps the child in the orphanage has a mother who would love to have her child at home but cannot find enough food; the sustainable solution then is to support the mother to support the child.[8] Perhaps a child is working on the street because the father is unemployed; a far better solution is to provide economic opportunities for the father. Perhaps the child with

[8] For a successful example from Sri Lanka, see Galappatti, A. (2002): "Caring for Separated Children: An Approach from Eastern Sri Lanka". Save the Children Norway.

bad war memories feels bitter when she or he is asked to repeat what happened, when what is far more concerning is the destroyed building next to the house, which reminds the child of the effects of war. Better, then, to work to improve Afghanistan's war-destroyed environment.

A holistic perspective looks at the ability of the country to support local communities, the ability of communities to support families and the ability of families, together with communities and their nation, to support their children. This approach is complex and requires long term commitments from many people and agencies and government bodies as well as appropriate donor support. For, despite all that this known from the **Children of Kabul** and related research and activity outcomes, it still is easier to raise money for an orphanage or for trauma counseling for children because these things are so *obviously* child-focused. Thus, there is still the need for greater understanding of how a holistic perspective is actually entirely child-focused, with the child at the center of all interventions.

Recommendation two: support people's own coping resources

Children in Kabul live amid harm, challenges and threats. Some children face difficulties from many angles –– family, community and the wider environment. Children who face such multiple risks (i.e., children whose context is represented entirely on the negative side of the context diagram on page 66 above) are especially vulnerable.

Still it must be recognized that the negative and harmful parts of children's lives are only one side of the **Children of Kabul** findings. There is, in addition, much evidence of good, positive and supportive influences for children in the city. And, in the opinion of parents and children in Kabul, as long as there are positive aspects in children's situations, then they will be able to cope with and overcome difficulties. The good interacts with the bad to decrease the negative consequences of the bad. This indicates that the best support for children can be given by promoting the positive aspects of their lives and trying to decrease the negative.

In both diagrams (above) it is clear how far from a child an NGO (especially an international NGO) is, and how much nearer the family, environment and local community are. As has been stated throughout the **Children of Kabul** findings, the most influential positive resources for children come from within themselves (their characters and personal qualities), from family relationships and from the local community. So, this is where all who work to support children should look for resources that can be built upon and sustained.

Of course, not all people in Kabul are coping perfectly and overcoming problems adequately. While parents in Kabul, for example, know how they would like to support their children, they also grapple with the fact of poverty and hardship. So even when parents know what they want for their children, they sometimes cannot provide or achieve it.

Still, most of the solutions found through the **Children of Kabul** project are not from external technical specialists but from children and parents stating what is hindering them in achieving the protection and care they desire for their children and working together on practical solutions.

Recommendation three: recognize that quality is as important as quantity

Children's opinions about their relationships show what is important in their lives. It is not enough for children that they have people around them; they desire support, love and kindness from those people. Children want to be listened to, protected and encouraged. They ask this of their friends, siblings, parents, grandparents, teachers, *mullahs*, and neighbors, and they find that this emotional support from others makes a real difference in how they feel about things and how they are able to cope with difficulties.

Thus, in seeking to support children, it is important that interventions focus on quality as much as quantity. Improving education for children in Afghanistan, for example, is not just about building schools and having enough teachers and books — although these are vitally important. It is also about the quality of what happens

in schools, whether the atmosphere is good for children's learning, with supportive teachers and equal access for all children — girls and boys, rich and poor, able-bodied and those with disabilities alike.

Recommendation four: promote a child-participatory approach

The **Children of Kabul** research team was able to get information about well being from a child's perspective by encouraging children to share their opinions and views. What emerges as the children's perspective reveals a strong degree of conformity between children's and adults' views, which reflects the fact that Afghan parents guide their children in how to think about life. This influences children to think and talk in the ways that adults think are appropriate.

Nonetheless, unique aspects of children's thoughts and perspectives did emerge. It is obvious, for example, how concerned children from Kabul are about their immediate physical environment and the things that happen to them — emotionally and physically — on a day-to-day basis, while their parents are likely concerned about larger issues. Children are concerned by having to fetch water and cross busy roads, about fighting with brothers and sisters or having a sibling who is more loved than they. However, while in many instances, children and parents just take a different perspective on the same issue, on some topics, children's and parents simply disagree: for example, on the use of physical punishment or being allowed out of the house to play or not being told the truth about a bad and harmful situation.

This confirms the importance of an approach in which children's opinions are listened to and taken seriously. To work on a child's level and with the issues children define and care about, adult development workers must leave behind their own ideas and perceptions about what is problematic or dangerous and accept what children say, whatever it is. This does not, however, mean that parents can renounce their own views for the sake of children's, for this would undermine the accepted parental responsibility to make decisions for the best interests of their children. It also denies the responsibility that children in many cultures have to respect and listen to their parents. Instead the focus should be on parents and children understanding each other's point of view.

In fact the children of Kabul gave some suggestions as to how this might be done. They said how important it is to be able to share and communicate about their problems. In addition, children talked about empathy, about being able to see things from another person's point of view. The way they may take on the concerns or burdens of others is a lesson in how adults can listen to and take seriously the difficulties children face.

"Parents should tell children the truth about why we have no money, and help them understand"

Youth girls' group discussion

And so it is recommended that development projects be created *with* children, not just *for* children.

Children can participate in identifying problems and in creating solutions. There is much evidence from the many **Children of Kabul** group discussions and follow-on activities that children who are involved in solving problems that affect their lives become responsible, sociable, confident, courageous and happy in the present. They also learn how to become good leaders for their society in the future.

Recommendation five: base interventions on good information

Finally, the **Children of Kabul** project has proved what a difference good information makes in working out how best to support children who have lived through difficult circumstances. Information that is based on the experiences and realities of children verifies what their concerns are, and motivates action.

Ideally, the **Children of Kabul** project is just the start of a long term commitment to building knowledge and information about the lives of Children in Kabul and throughout Afghanistan. There is much more to know. For example, it is important to know more about the experiences of disabled children and displaced children, and also to look at individual case studies of children who have faced difficulties, and summoned the resources to cope, but also the lingering impact of problems on their lives.

The commitment to learning and understanding more about the lives of children should not be for research, surveys and assessment alone. It should be for action and improvement during everyday interactions with children.

And, it is not just getting more information about children that is important. How information gathering is done is vital, too. The **Children of Kabul** project has shown the great benefit of making it possible for children to speak in ways that are comfortable for them. All people who seek to communicate with children have a responsibility to not, in the words of one Afghan child, "put salt on their wounds," but to listen and speak with empathy and sympathy as well as care and concern. Our time with Afghan children should not be another challenge they have to cope with, but should promote their positive feelings and sense of well being.

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Epilogue
A Follow-Up Project with Children in Kabul

Since the end of the research, SC/US has worked on two pilot projects, which were guided by the findings of the research project. In District 12 of Kabul, the children who participated in the *Children's Ideas Project* were very worried about the dangers of open wells in their community. They were especially concerned because they knew that in the previous year two children had fallen down an open well and died.

SC/US took this topic and made it the subject of a *Child-to-Child* program. *Child-to-Child* is the name of an approach to working with children that encourages children to find out more about the issues that concern them and to bring about action that will make the situation better. Children work in groups in a *Child-to-Child* program and, together, the group goes through six steps. In the first step, the groups think about the topic they are concerned about. In step two, children go out and find out more information about the problem. In step three, they think of ways to present the information they have about their concern. In step four, children present this information to their community using a variety of methods such as role plays or maps or posters. Finally, in step five, children take action on the problem, and in step six the children evaluate what impact their action has had.

In District 12, for step four, children prepared a public presentation about the dangers of open wells. About 400 people from the community attended this meeting, including parents and teachers. After adults heard the children's concern about the open wells, they decided to take action in various ways. First, they decided that they would ask the *mullahs* to announce in the mosques how dangerous open wells were for children and ask people to take care of them. Second, they decided to announce on the radio that people who owned houses in the area but were not living in them should come and take responsibility for covering the wells. Third, they decided to organize a campaign to cover all the wells in the community. Finally, the community decided to elect representatives who would form a committee to make sure that these action points were acted upon. (At the time of this writing, 600 wells, which were open, have been covered.)

In a second follow-up project, children worked on the issue of road safety. During the *Child-to-Child* steps, they identified a particularly busy corner where many children suffered traffic accidents. Again the children presented their concerns to the local community. Since then the local community committee has taken significant action. First, they have painted two large signs at the intersection to warn drivers to take care of children crossing the road. Second, they wrote a letter to the traffic police department asking for a traffic policeman to be assigned to the crossing. While waiting for this to be implemented, the community decided to ask the local scout association to take responsibility at the corner. Members of the traffic police training unit gave 15 members of the scout organization training on road safety. The scouts are now positioned at the crossing, helping children to cross the road in safety. The committee has also written to city officials, asking for a restructuring of the road corner to make it safer.

In both these communities there is a greater degree of awareness to children's concerns and community action on behalf of children's concerns. Clearly, SC/US hopes to encourage the use of this *Child-to-Child* problem-solving model throughout Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan, too. SC/US sees that additional achievements of the model would be these:

- Parents will know what children's concerns are by encouraging them to talk and identify children who are at risk, and by listening to them.
- Members of community committees will take responsibility for support to vulnerable families in their area.
- Children and committee members will be able to tackle more and more sensitive topics.
- Children and committees will be able to take their concerns to local governmental representatives.

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Annex One
Support for War-Affected Children: Guiding Frameworks

There is a continuing debate about the most effective ways to offer support for war-affected children, particularly in destroyed, destabilized, and developing countries. One very important development in this field is the recognition that the impact of war on children extends beyond physical loss; children are also affected socially and emotionally by war. Support for war-affected children should therefore include attention to their social and emotional as well as physical well being and recovery.

Currently, there are two frameworks that guide interventions to give social and emotional support to war-affected children. The first framework, which has been used for children in Rwanda, East Timor and Bosnia, among other nations, is the trauma-focused framework. The second framework is psychosocial. A psychosocial approach has been used in Palestine, Sri Lanka, Angola, and Sierra Leone as well as in East Timor and Bosnia and elsewhere.

The major differences between the two approaches are summarized in the following table:

	Trauma Approach	Psychosocial Approach
Focus	• Impact of war on children's mental health	• Impact of a range of problems on children's social relationships and emotional well being
	• Individual children	• Groups of children in the context of their families and communities
Main features	• Needs assessment is based on psychological and psychiatric measurements of post-traumatic stress disorder	• Needs assessment is based on subjective priorities defined by children and adults
	• Intervention consists of individual children receiving psychological and psychiatric treatment	• Wide range of possible interventions, often community-based, and involving children's groups. Focus on building children's relationships, reestablishing a sense of normality, supporting family life and giving children opportunities for emotional expression
	• Intervention makes the assumption that children can only be healed through technical assistance	• Intervention based on identifying and strengthening children's own coping and resilience resources
	• Generally applicable for minority of war-affected children	• Applicable for all war-affected children
	• High cost and dependent on technical expertise	• Low cost and aims for local level sustainability

Save the Children and UNICEF unequivocally promote a psychosocial approach for working with war-affected children. Both organizations state this in their mandates and reflect it in their policy and program strategies. Both organizations believe that a psychosocial framework is a wide reaching and appropriate approach for

providing emotional and social support to significant numbers of children. This is especially the case in a country like Afghanistan, where mental health services are scarce, and individually focused treatment options essentially non-existent. Instead of investing in costly technical assistance to train people who would be able to help a relatively small number of children in an unsustainable way through professional psychological interventions, a psychosocial approach is likely to benefit more children in sustainable and culturally appropriate ways — ways that children themselves define when speaking of their concerns and their ability to cope.

The **Children of Kabul** project validates a psychosocial approach for the majority of Afghan children. While there is evidence in Kabul of severe clinical mental health impacts of war on a small number of children, the overwhelming evidence is of children, parents, extended families and communities concerned with and working towards a broader definition of well being than one based on mental health status alone. A psychosocial framework appears to capture the complexity of their concerns and reality in an effective way. The methodology of the research, which allowed children and their families to talk about their experiences in open ended and supportive discussions, appears to be critical in implementing a psychosocial approach — with sensitivity to the feelings and rights of children.

What the **Children of Kabul** research also shows is that the children of Kabul are as concerned about the problems in their present situation as they are with the impact of past wars and direct experiences of fighting. For them, it is every day problems that need solving. And, when children do worry about war, they have resources: parents' care and advice, the experience of happiness, and learning new skills, for example. In seeking to support the children of Kabul and all of Afghanistan, the best place to start is by understanding and complementing what people are already doing for themselves.

A psychosocial approach does not preclude the use of a trauma-focused strategy for some children. It is well known that in Kabul, as in all war-zones, there will be a small minority of children who need clinical mental health assistance to address and overcome their problems. So a trauma approach may be relevant for a small minority of all Afghan children. However, the majority will benefit from a psychosocial framework which allows room for children themselves to define why and how the suffer, what they want and hope for in life and how others — family, friends, neighbors, government officials, *mullahs*, teachers and humanitarian workers —can help them build upon their own efforts in overcoming myriad obstacles and achieving well being.

Annex Two
Full List of Negative Feelings Described by Research Participants

Gham – Sorrow

Characteristics:	tired; no appetite; burning in the heart; not aware of self; worrying and thinking about the future a lot; frowning; tears in the eyes; pensive; sad; impatient; nervous (*asaby*)
Causes:	death of loved ones and friends; starvation; bad economic condition of the family; lack of shelter; being an orphan with no supporter; war; being away from loved ones
Coping:	have people around you who sympathize with you, who prevent you from being lonely, who give you advice and make you busy; have people remind you that this is God's will; have people around you who tell you a story of someone worse off than yourself so that you feel grateful to God for what you have; have financial improvement either through assistance from others or good fortune; keep away from the reminder of the incident

Khafaquan - Feeling strangled

Characteristics:	difficulty in breathing; strangling sensation; not aware of yourself; black and blue flesh appears like bruising but without being hit
Causes:	a lot of worry (*pereshany*) and thoughts; bad economic situation for the family; starvation
Coping:	have people around you who are sympathetic and who talk with you about other subjects so that you can forget your pain; go to the doctor to get medicine

Tashwish – Worry

Characteristics:	age quickly; teeth fall out; lose weight; always have pain
Causes:	bad financial condition of the family; being alone; losing friends; war
Coping:	having people around who prevent loneliness, entertain and keep you busy; "not paving the way for *tashwish*" — not allowing worry to take hold

Tashwish asaby – Worry/Mental anxiety

Characteristics:	lack of sleep; bad memories; thinking a lot; not normal; being spirit possessed; laughing and crying in turn; depression; headache; beat themselves; foaming at the mouth; body becomes stiff
Causes:	having a lot of *tashwish*, which does not get solved

Shock asaby – Mental shock

Characteristics:	madness (*dewana*), fear (*tars*)
Causes:	loss of money through debt; seeing a rocket attack, hearing a bomb explode
Coping:	having advice and encouragement from people around you; seeing that you are alive; going to the mental hospital and having quietness

Kamzory – Weakness

Characteristics:	yellow/pale color; feeling weak; dehydrated — dry lips; no energy to walk
Causes:	not being fresh, not being hopeful

Tars – Fear

Characteristics: thinking that bad things will happen all the time; mental problems; shocked; wild look of terror; worry

Causes: witnessing traffic accidents; witnessing mine accidents, fighting; bomb and airplane explosions; darkness; earthquakes; being afraid of your own fears

Coping: going to the doctor; having someone to accompany you in the dark; going to the *mullah* to get an amulet or verses of the Koran to put in water to drink; eating nice 'warm' food

Pereshany – Worry

Characteristics: look ill; look like they have bitterness; withdrawn; look sorrowful; don't laugh; lost in their own thoughts

Causes: illness; bad economic conditions in the family; thinking about the difficulties of the home; losing a father; envy and jealousy of others who are better off than oneself; no money and dependent on others

Coping: seeing a country where schools, factories and clinics are rebuilt; having people around who keep you busy, who suggest solutions for your problems, who give suggestions for how to live, who distract you and help you make sense of life

Dewana – Madness

Characteristics: saying nonsense; being a stranger to yourself

Causes: difficult living conditions; bad financial situation of the family; war and bereavement; envy of other's good fortune; illness; bad food; lack of follow up for treatment of sickness; unrequited love

Coping: going to a doctor; having someone to help financially

Rawany taklef – Mental illness

Characteristics: beating themselves; beating others; speaking nonsense; not normal; grinding teeth; foaming at the mouth; not aware of eating; not paying attention to their physical appearance; looking like they have sorrow (*gham geen*)

Khulsu jonoon – Dizzy madness

Characteristics: pensive; dizziness; no energy; loneliness; making issues out of nothing; hypercritical for no reason

Causes: bad economic condition of the family; illiteracy; smoking hashish and other drugs; feeling a lot of pressure

Coping: having people around you who give you advice, keep you happy; having a peaceful situation in the country

Narum – Being uncomfortable

Characteristics: impatient; sleepless; feeling negative; not going out

Tanhayee- Loneliness

Characteristics: pale color; withdrawn; pensive; anti social; passive

Taklef roly – Social problems

Characteristics: sorrow; not fresh, dried up; nothing left in them; pale color; pensive; dry lips

Yud Awarenda – Remembrance

Characteristics: lifeless; not fresh; illness (*rang jur*); sorrow (*gham*); pensive; feeling lonely

Dard-e-nagahani tasagufy – Empathetic pain and aches

Characteristics: complaining; irritated; being annoyed; showing an allergic reaction to those around you
Causes: jealousy and envy; war; losing friends and relatives; family discord and dispute
Coping: finding a job according to your choice; not having people talking about sorrow in front of you; having people around you who make promises that will ease the pain and bring healing; having people around who show sympathy; have leisure together with friends.

Ochdar – Jealousy/Resentment

Characteristics: a large physical node of resentment builds up in the heart. This node can be felt like a rock
Causes: being resentful that someone has a better situation than you; blaming other people for your misfortune; people making your suffering worse by not helping
Coping: having people help you and gather around you to comfort you

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Save the Children.
USA
Darul Aman Main Road
Sher Kat Bus Stop
Ayoob Khan Mena
District 7
Kabul, Afghanistan

unicef
United Nations Children's Fund
Afghanistan Country Office
House # 81, Nawabi Watt
Char Rahi Haji Yaqub, Shahre Naw
Kabul, Afghanistan

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